Pentecost +2 2020 - It Is He That Made Us
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Exodus 19:1-8, Psalm 100, Romans 5:1-11, Matthew 9:35-10:15

At times, we are so aware of all the pain and anger in our world that we forget the world is a song of praise to our God. Our Psalm today captures this explosive, joyful praise. It makes me think of the ancient Christian Celts. They lived in a far more dangerous world, yet they left a collection of prayers and poems that still inspire today.

Consider this song of praise composed early in the 10th century by a Welsh monk. As he was transcribing a metrical gospel, he composed his own metrical song of praise to God. It is as though the rhythm of the gospel gets inside him, comes out from him. He creates using the same form and writing in Latin, Welsh and Irish. His is giving voice to God’s praise by creating. He writes,

Almighty Creator, it is you who made
The land and the sea…
The world cannot comprehend in song bright and melodious,
Even though the grass and trees should sing,
All your wonders, O true Lord!
The Father created the world by a miracle,
It is difficult to express its measure.
Letters cannot contain it, letters cannot comprehend it.
Jesus created for the hosts of Christendom
With miracles when he came:
Resurrection through his nature for them.
He who made the wonder of the world,
Will save us, has saved us.
It is not too great a toil to praise the Trinity.
Clear and high in the perfect assembly,
Let us praise above the nine orders of angels
The sublime and blessed Trinity.
Purely, humbly, and in skillful verse,
I should love to give praise to the Trinity,
According to the greatness of his power.
God has required of the host in this world
Who are his, that they should at all times,
All together, fear the Trinity.
The one who has power, wisdom and dominion
Above heavens, below heaven, completely;
It is not too great a toil to praise the Son of Mary.

This song of praise is written in a series of nine triplets to reflect a world ordered by the love of the Triune God and reflecting back that love in a symphony of praise.

In today’s Psalm, all the earth or all the lands are called to make a joyful noise: bird song, rain drop, hand clap, and all those joyful noises in between. It is vast celebration before the Lord that includes all the families of the earth: sounding out praise in word and act. Verse 2 invites all the
lands to follow the Lord God of Israel: “to serve Him with gladness and to come into his presence with singing!” The nations stream to Zion to bow down and worship the Lord.

At the heart of the Psalm, we see an image of our Creator and Redeemer. Verse three reads, *Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*

I want to briefly meditate on this verse and how it points to the revelation of the Lord in verse 5 while also highlighting His redeeming grace. The verse can be viewed through the following three phrases:

First sentence - Know that the Lord He is God.

Second sentence - It is He who made us.

Elaboration - We are His, we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture.

Know that the Lord He is God – The word know speaks of revealing. The name Lord stands in for YHWH. By rescuing His people in slavery, YHWH reveals the nature of the Creator God. He is good; His love is steadfast; He is faithful to all generations. Our Creator is absolutely trustworthy. He does not abandon His people in sin and death.

In the words of Romans 5, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (vs 8), and “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.” (vs 10). Just as he rescued the ancient Hebrew slaves in Egypt, He rescues us as well. In Christ, the Lord has made a way for Jew and Gentile to be fully reconciled to God.

Know that the Lord He is God is both a truth statement and a promise. Our Redeemer is also our Creator. This is true. He is revealing Himself to us in Christ. This is also promise. He comes to open the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf. Just as Ancient Israel was often unaware of their blindness, we are often unaware of how false ideas, heart wounds, and idols influence our thoughts and actions.

He comes to set us free from powers that control us and confuse us. He reveals His love even as He reveals the falsity of the idols that control us. Romans 1 -3 reveals that Jew and Gentile alike have turned away from God. The ways of this world way heavy on us and often lead us down paths of loss and pain and brokenness. Even as we hear the anger and pain in our news, we feel the grief and pain. The way of peace seems lost.

God does not leave us in darkness but comes to us again and again, leading back into His life and peace. Every week when we worship together, we hear the word of peace from our Lord and then we speak the word of peace to one another.

Know that the Lord He is God.

This brings us to our second sentence.

It is He who made us.

Romans 4 reminds us of the story of Abraham. The Lord called Abraham out from a world that was trapped in idolatry and spiraling toward death. He promised a future and new life. He promised to raise Abraham up as the Father of all who believe, the Father of the nations, the Father of us all. In due time, the Lord brought life to Sarah’s dead womb and Isaac was born.
This was a sign of God’s life-giving power. Through Abraham’s offspring, the Lord would also raise up nations who were dead in sin and death.

We see the life-giving power in the story of Abraham’s descendants: the Hebrew slaves. The Hebrews have been enslaved by Pharaoh, that is the powers of Egypt. Their royal status as descendants of Abraham have been stripped away. They are simply slaves. They groan under the weight of their suffering. The Lord hears their groans and raises up Moses to rescue them.

When Moses goes to Pharaoh and asks him to let the Hebrew slaves go, he specifically asks that the people can go and worship the Lord with sacrifice and feast. Pharaoh says no. He will not let them go worship another God. They serve him and the gods of Egypt. He cannot release them to this god of the desert.

What comes next? A war of the gods. The Lord of Angel Armies systematically humiliates and defeats all the Egyptian gods even Pharaoh himself. The redemption of the Hebrew slaves is an act of war against the Pharaoh, the false gods and the powers that be.

In our reading from Exodus we hear, “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Ex 19:4–6).

The Lord breaks the dehumanizing power of the Egyptian gods and restores His people as a kingdom of priests. He has raised a dead nation back to life and has made them into a kingdom of priests. When Jesus rescued us from sin and death, we became a new creation. He is making us into lights that shine out in the universe, living stones that sing his praise, a glorious bride who rules the cosmos alongside Him.

It is He who made us

We are His, we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture.

At Mount Sinai, the Hebrew slaves become the children of Israel. They worship the Lord, giving thanks and praise. In Exodus 20, the Lord speaks to them. He says, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. “You shall have no other gods before me. “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them.”

These two commands serve as a call to worship the redeemer God and to renounce the false gods that distort, enslave, and corrupt His people. Walter Brueggemann writes, “To praise is to reject alternative loyalties and false definitions of reality. Praise is relentlessly polemical.”

Thus, praise is always a social/political act. As they worship the Lord, they must renounce the old gods of Egypt. These powers, these ideas, these patterns of Egypt enslave and dehumanize. The Lord restores them to the image of God they were created to be.

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Even as we worship our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we are turning away from the powers that seek to control us in our lives, in our culture, and in our world. These powers are always dehumanizing whether they take the form of Pharaoh Ruler of Egypt or addiction to pornography or even a call to justice that bypasses the cross. In CS Lewis’s *The Great Divorce*, we see a powerful picture of controlling powers or idols that misshape and dehumanize people.

These powers can take the form of complaint like the woman who grumbles so much that all that is left of a grumble. They can take the form of pride, pursuit of knowledge, greed, desire for attention, resentment, bitterness, racism, and more. Romans shows us what happens to people who fall under the spell these powers. They lose part of their humanity. Their love and desires are disordered. They become enslaved by sin and death. They are oppressed and they also oppress one another. They are enemies of God.

When He rescues us, our eyes are opened to His glory. The same God who gave us our lives as gift, gives us our freedom as gift. We are free to love, to worship. Our existence is gift. Our bodies are gift.

Think about that: Your life and your mind and your body are gifts: the gift of God. Your life and my life begins in the generosity of God, the communion of love between Father, Son, and Spirit. When He restores and makes us His people and shepherds us, He leads us into a communion of love.

We are not born or made to live in isolation. Joseph Ratzinger reminds us that we begin life inside another human being. We are a separate body and separate person and yet completely dependent. Even after birth, the child is dependent on the mother.  

This tells us something profound about our humanity. We are dependent on God and one another. We are made to live within the communion of loving exchange. Giving and receiving love. Our whole life is meant to be a liturgy or worshipful pattern of this love. In our praying, in our eating and drinking, in our work, in our time for fun, we give thanks to God for His gracious gifts even as we give thanks for one another for the many kindnesses we receive.

This gives us a picture of what it means to be a kingdom of priests. In our daily prayers and weekly worship we praise the Lord and turn away from the false powers of this world and in our hearts, recognizing our own tendency to turn yet again from God to the gods of our own making. He reforms us in love and gives us to word of peace to speak to one another and ultimately to all the earth. All the earth will make a joyful noise before the Lord and the nations will look upon us, God’s people and behold His goodness, His lovingkindness, and His faithfulness.

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