

Psalm 150  
Punctuated with Praise  
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9-10-17

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It doesn't take much to realize that our souls are designed to search. From the very dawn of existence, we have sought to understand and explore our place in the cosmos.

It's little wonder that the solar eclipse a few weeks ago utterly captivated our imaginations. It literally drew our gaze once again to the heavens in wonder. But if you think that was cool, take a look at this picture of a solar eclipse back in 2006. The Cassini Space Craft captured this breathtaking view of the Sun Eclipsed by Saturn. How cool is that?!? What our attempts to discover reveal, consciously or unconsciously, our need to worship. Or as Saint Augustine famously said: our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.

Our Souls are designed to search. And the object of our exploration, (whether we realize it or not) is God.

John Ortberg writes: If you read through the Bible, you get the sense that the soul was designed to search for God. The Hebrew Scriptures—the Great Soul-Book of human literature—are almost obsessed with this thought. Psalm 61, the soul thirsts for the Mighty One. Psalm 143, it thirsts for him like parched land thirsts for water. Psalm 33, Like a laser it focuses the full intensity of its desire on him. Psalm 25, it lifts itself up to him, it blesses him, it clings to him. Indeed, our souls live for God, it is desperate to be whole, the soul is smitten by God, it's God-crazy, God-obsessed.

As we were led into worship this morning by our children the simple words of that song are the most profound invitation a human being can experience. Praise Him. Praise Him.

We are made for worship. It is the most natural thing in the world to do. In fact, everyone worships. Whether we realize it or not, every person who has ever lived spends their life in one form of liturgy or another. It's just that some liturgies lead us further from the heart of our creator, and another draws us into the very courts of his presence.

So, who is it that we worship? The quick answer is that we worship the God revealed to us in the pages of Holy Scripture. But begin to dig a little deeper and you realize we worship the one who created us from the follicles of our heads to the callouses below our feet. We worship the God who formed the nearly 8 million different species of animals and nearly 300 million different species of plant life—each individually unique and purposed. Even the mosquitos, hard as that is to believe. We worship the God who has set the nearly 100 billion different galaxies in motion. The mind boggling magnitude of the universe all by itself almost drives us to our knees, saying who am I Lord?

And yet this God has made himself known to our species. First revealing himself to a herdsman from Iraq named Abram, who made a promise that he would be blessed in order to be a blessing. The God who led that rag tag nation into and out of captivity, through wilderness wanderings, and into a promised land. And finally, after we spurned that promise time and again, he left eternity and became incarnate among us in that sleepy little corner of Bethlehem. God grew up, learned the trade of carpentry from his earthly dad, then left the family business and began the true family

business. He had a few friends who followed him, listening to his teaching on mercy and forgiveness and love, and witnessing his God-inspired miracles among a bunch of nobodies from nowhere. Ultimately the people he came to love rejected him and crucified on a cross. Then a few days later when no one was paying attention that man left the grave and walked into new life, different life, wholly different life—a life he invites you and I to see and embody in worship.

It couldn't be more mundane, and yet at the same time perfectly poetic.

This is the God we worship, who comes to us by His Spirit and inspires our praise to see and welcome him into our lives in joyful praise. This is our liturgy. This is our story. Is it your story? Is this the story that gives your life its axis point?

Second: How do we worship? The Psalmist writes praise him with trumpets, praise him with lute and lyre, praise him with tambourines and with dancing. Praise is another avenue for worship. In the Old Testament God required sacrifices of bulls and goats. The New Covenant requires sacrifices of praise. Peter tells us that as Christ's new royal priesthood we are to offer spiritual sacrifices which means to declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light.

Peter and John left the Sanhedrin with bleeding backs and praising lips (Acts 5:41). Paul and Silas filled the Philippian jail with their songs of praise (Acts 16:25). They were offering a sacrifice of praise. What he is saying to you and me is that God wants our uninhibited praise. Presbyterians, our default setting is to worship between our ears, and in this way our minds are brought under the rule of God. But God says he wants our whole heart, our whole being to bow before him—and that means our emotions too!

Jesus says in John 4 that **the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.**

As soon as we start to limit the bounds by which God's people can express their worship and praise to God, we have turned worship into something that God utterly detests, idols. Because we are telling God how things will be, we are fashioning God in our image. Richard Foster puts it this way: The real question is not: what will meet my need? The real question of worship is: what kind of worship does God call for? It's clear that God calls for wholehearted worship. And it is as reasonable to expect wholehearted worship to be physical as to expect it to be cerebral.

Lastly, the great worship experiment. Frank Laubach puts it this way: do you not see that God is trying experiments with human lives? That is why there are so many of them...He has seven billion experiments around the world at this moment. And the question is: How far will this man or that woman allow me to carry this hour?

Worship is not just an event, it's an inhabitation of God's Spirit in the daily workings of our lived experience.

Sometimes people will say, I got discouraged because I wasn't getting into the worship, or I wasn't getting anything out of the worship. And what I want to ask them is this: tell me about your weekly conversation with God. Because worship here is meant to be a bookend to the daily rhythms and liturgies.

But I'm not a really religious person, or I'm really busy and I have a hard time knowing how to spend time with God. I get distracted, or I wait and wait and nothing happens. But I think God is less interested in scheduled meetings and more interested in ongoing conversation.

Can I give you a person illustration of what I mean? If you've been with us the last few weeks and the last few years, you will know that my wife Amy has had a very difficult stretch. Our family has been pushed to the brink, stretched like a taught rubber band. What keeps us from snapping or plummeting over the edge into deep despair? The daily rhythms of worship. It's a choice to orient your life in a way that invites God into every moment, even the most mundane.

Find yourself awake at 4 in the morning, an hour or two before your alarm goes off? Instead of lying there frustrated that you've come out of your daily coma early, turn it into tender moments of predawn worship. Put the coffee on, find a comfortable chair, spend time reading or simply thanking God that you have another day to wake up to.

Putting in your order at McDonalds? Instead of seeing the person in front of you not as an automaton, but as a unique son or daughter of the Living God.

Listening to NPR or WBCL or WOWO on your way to or from work? As the news headlines travel through your radio, incorporate them into your daily liturgy of prayer in lifting them up to God and inviting God to shape you through the stories.

Sitting down at dinner, allow God to transform the time from merely utilitarian calorie intake, and allow this simple daily event to remind us of the Eucharistic gift of Christ's body and blood for us.

As we're paying the bills, giving thanks for those who provide services that enrich our lives, and for the resources to meet our responsibilities.

Walking the dog, hearing the rustling grass beneath our feet and the gentle breezes that declare God's praise.

This is the liturgy of daily living, worship as a way of life. It is how we have survived and thrived these last few years.

Again, Richard Foster writes, punctuate each moment with worship. It's what St. Paul means when he says pray without ceasing. This awareness of God's presence with us is what we were made to know and participate in. It is how we come to know and understand how it is that frail, dusty human beings like you and me can be made in the image of the living God.

Worship...it's what you were made to do. So praise Him. Praise Him. Praise Him.