

012223 "What do I depend on?" Psalm 146:1-5

There was a New Testament professor at Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey. He did not sing any praise at Chapel time. This professor did not sing praise because he knew that he was tone deaf. Even the students were well aware of that fact. Then one day the professor was singing hymns during chapel hours. The students were surprised how he sang so passionately when he was off tone.

They asked the professor in class. "Professor, what's gotten into you that you even sang hymns during chapel hours?" Then the professor said, "I had a dream the night before. I knocked to heaven and Peter asked who I was. So I answered that I have been at church since I was a child and now I am a professor of theology in college. Then Peter looked through a book and told me that I have a lot of studying done, but I do not have any record of the sacrifice of praise. Peter continues, "Heaven does not want a knowledgeable doctor of theology, but a person who praises God. Go back and sing a lot of hymns!" I woke up to the dream when the doors to the heaven closed on me. It is good to know a lot about theology, but I realized that it is most important for me to actually live a life that praises God.

Praise the LORD! Lifelong praise through bearing witness to God's reign is the theme of Psalm 146. Verse 1 says, "Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul." In Hebrew, "Hallelujah, Halal Yahweh, Nepesh" Halal is usually translated as "praise." The word halal is part of the word "Hallelujah" which is the combination of the word Halal (praise) and Yah (the LORD). Together they mean "praise God" or "praise the LORD".

It should be noted that today's psalm does not just say, "Praise the Lord," but

says, "Praise the Lord, O my soul." It's relatively easy to say "Praise the Lord" to others. But it's another matter for me to live a life of praising the Lord myself.

We do not know who wrote this psalm for sure. Some biblical scholars think that maybe Ezra or Nehemiah wrote this psalm. Some scholars believe David penned this psalm. Yet, regardless of the author or of the original purpose of this psalm, it reminds us of the foolishness of trusting in human and of the blessedness of trusting in God.

Whether this psalm is of David or not, David, who was King of Judah, also proclaimed to his people that they should rely on God in his many psalms. He did not say, 'I am king, so you must rely on me.' He is saying that no person, even himself, is worth depending on.

Verses 3 and 4 say, "Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing." This does not mean to distrust and doubt a person. The emphasis is that the only being worth our trust and faith the one and only God. Sometimes, it can be helpful if you know someone who is influential. However, the Bible clearly states that such princes, not even the authorities, should be relied on.

Augustine was the bishop of Hippo in North Africa in the fourth century, and in his memoir called *The Confessions* he prayed a prayer that has moved us ever since. "You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you."

Here is the greatest hunger God conquers and the greatest thirst God quenches: God answers our longing for God. God restores our souls by giving

us God's own self.

This Psalm today is telling us to depend on God, to entrust it to the Lord. What does it mean specifically to depend on God? What do we do in our everyday lives? The answer that the Bible offers is to sing praise God.

Isaiah 43:21 says, "the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise."

Why is God almighty, asking us to pray, wanting us to praise God, and being happy? Since God knows everything, can't he just understand and accept our hearts? Jesus is the Son of God and the Triune God, so why did he pray to God the Father in every ministry? We believe God is triune—one being, eternally existing in three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), all equally God who know and love each other. If you read the prayers of Jesus and the lives of many people in the Bible, you see that God delights in personal relationships with us humans! Even Jesus taught his disciples to pray, and don't we who live in the 21st century still pray the Lord's Prayer? Sing the Lord's Prayer? Why?

Think of it this way. If you have grandchildren, would you be okay with them not telling you anything? You know they already love you, but when they tell you they love you anyway, who will say, "I already know, so I'm not happy at all?" you are happy. Even though you already know they love you. Why? Because that's relationship. These days, in Thursday Bible study, we study Psalm 23, it begins with, "The LORD is my shepherd." That's relationship! It is not for the sake of saying nice things to God, but sometimes we confess our struggles, our difficulties, our joys and sorrows before God through prayer and praise. Because God is pleased with it.

Isaiah 43:1-2 says, "But now, this is what the LORD says-- he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."

George Lindbeck wrote his own book called *The Nature of Doctrine* where he suggests that if you're actually seeking faith maybe your best bet is not just to think about it, but to watch it at work. If you're curious about worship, attend a worship service. If the hymn puzzles you, sing it.

When he retired, people asked him to say a few words. It was Christmastime and Professor Lindbeck had just gotten out of Yale New Haven Hospital where he had been recovering from surgery. His remarks ended like this: "Last week I was listening to NPR and heard the annual Christmas concert of the Saint Olaf College Choir. After the concert the radio host asked one of the Saint Olaf students why she enjoyed singing in the choir. She said: 'Because when I sing in this choir, I join in song that began long before I came here and that will continue long after I am gone.'" "When I do theology," said George, "I join in song that began long before I came here and that will continue long after I am gone."

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, continue to communicate with God through prayer and praise. I hope you sincerely praise and participate in worship. Furthermore, I hope that your life will be a message that praises God. Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you, your family, your business, your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.