

## **090824 "How Great Thou Art" Psalm 146:1-6**

Webster's Dictionary defines "rally" as both a verb meaning "to gather for a common purpose" and a noun meaning "a renewal of energy in joint action." During the summer, our various activities, vacations, and events often pull congregation members apart, especially on weekends. Summer can also be spiritually draining. You may start with good intentions to stick to your Bible-reading schedules and worship on a regular basis, but the busy summer schedule can easily derail these intentions. By the end of summer, we need a "renewal of energy" in our spiritual lives.

If you read the book of Acts, which records the beginning of the church, you see that on the first day after the Sabbath, which is today Sunday, people gathered together to celebrate and commemorate the resurrection of Jesus and sing praises on a regular basis. It's challenging to renew your spiritual energy alone, but much easier in a group. That's why we dedicate a special day at the end of summer to "rally" - to come together for a common purpose, seeking the Holy Spirit's power to renew our energy for worship, studying God's Word, praying, serving, and witnessing. Dear friends, welcome to church today. May God's goodness and mercy be with you all your life long, in the name of Jesus.

When I was in high school, my school required us to attend classes on Sundays. However, I couldn't miss church, so I would go to the early morning service before heading to school. Being part of the church student choir was very special to me; I found grace in the Word of God and renewed strength through our songs of praise. Even though I had to study after church on Sunday afternoons, I felt content and could focus better. The songs we sang in the choir provided me with great strength and comfort throughout the week. Reflecting on the lyrics and feeling the Lord's comfort was truly amazing!

The psalm today begins with a call to praise: "Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul!" Hallelujah is a compound word made up of two Hebrew words: hallel (meaning 'praise') and Jah or Yah (meaning 'the Lord' or a contraction of the name for God, Yahweh). So hallelujah means 'Praise the Lord (or Praise Yahweh).' The author is calling himself, and all of us, to a lifestyle of worship—praising God with our whole being.

Five psalms, from Psalms 146 to 150, are collectively called the Hallelujah Psalms. The numerous psalms preceding Psalm 146 explored the authors' grief, shame, sin, doubt, and fear, capturing the highs and lows of God's people, their defeats and victories, and their struggles with faith. Now, in these concluding psalms, every word is dedicated to praise God.

As the early church members demonstrated, praising God certainly begins with the Sunday service, but it does not end with the service. Praise must continue in your daily life during the week. "Praising God" in practical ways goes beyond verbal expressions of worship and can be reflected in how you live daily. Here are some practical ways to praise God in everyday life: Regularly setting aside time to pray, expressing gratitude, and acknowledging God's presence in your life is a simple but profound way to praise God. Praise can be as simple as thanking God for the little things.

Jesus said that when we serve others, we are serving Him (Matthew 25:40). Acts of kindness, generosity, and selflessness—whether helping a neighbor, volunteering, or giving to those in need in Jesus' name—are tangible ways of praising God by reflecting His love. Whether your talent is music, art, teaching, or administration, using your God-given gifts to serve others and the church is a way to honor and praise Him.

In addition, living in obedience to God's Word and striving to reflect Christ's

character, not your own character, in your actions is an ongoing way of praising Him. This includes integrity at work, honesty in relationships, and seeking to live in accordance with biblical values. Jesus commanded us to love one another (John 13:34). By forgiving, being patient, and showing compassion to others, you praise God through your relationships which is really important!

This Psalm today is telling you to depend on God all through your life. Even when things go wrong, put your trust in the Lord. It is relatively easy to praise God when everything is going well. However, it is really difficult to live like verse 2 says, "I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long." As we live, there are sunny days and cloudy days. There are days when we are happy even when we have nothing, and there are days when we are sad even when we seem to have everything.

Despite all that, will you praise God every day of your life? Today's psalm challenges us as we celebrate Rally Day. Choosing to praise God during hard times, trusting that God is good even when life is difficult, is one of the most powerful forms of worship. Holding onto hope and joy, even in the face of challenges, reflects confidence in God's sovereignty and praises Him for His control over your life. I don't know about you, but I definitely believe that.

My father, who was a Methodist pastor and is now retired, always said that when you get to heaven, there will be no need for prayers, no need for Bible studies, no need for administrative meetings. All that will remain is praising God. Whether you were a member of a choir on earth or not, we will all be members of a choir in the Kingdom of God.

There is something truly special about a hymn that brings you closer to the Lord. Singing those lyrics feels like being immersed in the power and love of God. One of the most impactful hymns of all time is "How Great Thou Art." I love listening

to, singing, and playing this incredible hymn, and knowing the story behind the song makes it even more beautiful.

The Swedish preacher Carl Boberg was inspired to write the poem after experiencing a thunderstorm on the southeast coast of Sweden. The storm was violent, but then the sun came out and birds began singing. Boberg was left in awe and fell to his knees in adoration of God. He named the poem "O Store Gud" (O Mighty God) and submitted it to a local newspaper. It was translated into German and Russian later.

Then Stuart Hine who was a British Methodist missionary translated the song to English and added verses and arranged the Swedish melody. This hymn "How Great Thou Art" is loved by many Christians. Verses 1 and 2 sing of God the Father, the Creator. Verse 3 sings of God the Son, the Redeemer, and verse 4 sings of the final victory and salvation.

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, as we reflect on Psalm 146 and "How Great Thou Art," we are reminded of two great truths. First, we are called to a life of worship—lifting our hearts and voices to God, the Creator and Redeemer, in awe of God's greatness. Second, we are warned not to place our trust in human power, but to put our hope in the faithful, eternal God who made heaven and earth. May we, like the psalm author and the hymn writer, let our souls sing, declaring with joy, "How great Thou art!" Let our lives be marked by unwavering trust in the One who remains faithful forever, and let our hearts be filled with awe and wonder as we consider God's great love and power. 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. To Christ be thanks and praise. Amen.