

**“We Wait, We Hope, We Stay”**  
**Shannon Smythe**  
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**Westminster Presbyterian Church**  
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Stop for a moment and consider how the bible begins and ends. Consider Genesis. Now consider Revelation. But what about Psalms? Psalm 1 functions as a kind of preamble urging us to take on a lifestyle that locates its source for living in the creator. By the end of the Psalter, we encounter five psalms in a row all focused solely on songs of praise.

Psalm 147 is the second of five “Alleluia” hymns that close the Psalter. Each of the last five psalms starts and ends with the imperative, “Praise the Lord”. In Hebrew, the word is *halelu*; in Greek it is *alleluia*. The grammatical form of the word is a plural imperative, which, for those of you who don’t fancy yourselves a Grammarian, means a vital or urgent command. So, three different times throughout the whole of Psalm 147, the psalmist is giving an urgent command to the people to “Praise Yah” or “Praise Adonai.” It is not a suggestion. It is not, “hey, look, if and when you feel like it, when it feels good and right to you, praise the Lord.” The Psalmist says, this is non-negotiable. It is an essential act that must be done. In the strongest of terms, the psalmist is calling the community of the faithful to praise the Lord. And, five times over, the Book of Psalms concludes with these psalms calling the people to give their Alleluias to God.

If you feel I’m belaboring a relatively simple point, it is because I think there is something profound for us to consider in this radical simplicity. We are to be people of praise. In all things. At all times.

In Psalm 147, there is a threefold repetition of this command to praise. By the final Psalm— Psalm 150, there are no less than 10 calls to praise. Each call to praise in Psalm 147, is followed immediately a powerful accounting of the reasons for such urgent praise. All the reasons center, of course, on who God is and what God has done for us. The long and short of it is that there is no shortage of reasons for praise.

God is rebuilding the city.

God is healing the brokenhearted.

God is in charge of the vast universe, even naming and numbering the stars in the galaxy.

God enacts loving justice, liberating the oppressed and casting down the wicked.

God provides rains for the land and food for the animals, even hearing the cries of baby birds.

From the heights to the depths. From the galaxy to the smallest of creatures. From the worst of human destruction and devastation to the deepest interior wounds and suffering. From the worst of injustices to the worst of wicked offenses. God, the creator of all, is also the sustainer and redeemer of all. God is intimately involved in the world, from humans to the smallest of creatures. There is nothing that escapes the care and attention of God. For those suffering, God heals their wounds. For those devastated by destruction of cities, God is the one who rebuilds.

For all the animals and the land, God provides what they need. And God is even intimately involved in the farthest corners of the mysterious galaxy, too.

So, the question is, have you been convinced—have the psalmists’ reasons for praise convicted you? The reason I ask this question is that the urgent calls to praise and the accompanying reasons for the praise, requires a response from us. The audience is called to open our mouths, life up our voices, and join the psalmist’s joyous song. We are all meant to take up the songs that we have learned from the Psalter and to sing those songs out in the world.

In general, we tend to think the purpose of singing in worship as something we do as part of our relationship with God, as something we do *for* God. But the direction of the call to praise at the end of the Psalter is a little different. We are enjoined here to come to worship, to learn the praise of God, and then to go out into the world and sing these songs out there. For you see, the praise that is called for in Psalm 147 has very specific content: it is testimony **about** God. Some psalms have praises sung **to** God, like in Psalm 145, where it says: “All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord” (v. 10). But notice that Psalm 147 is giving testimony about God in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person: “The Lord lifts up the downtrodden; he casts the wicked to the ground” (v. 6). Old Testament scholar Patrick Miller has written: “the purpose of praise [is] . . . to bear witness to all who hear that God is God.” Psalm 147 calls us to testify about God out in the world.

As we resumed Praying the Psalms and Bible Study this week, I heard, time and again, folks in this congregation give powerful testimony to who God is and what God has done, in their lives and in the world. Those of us who were on those Zoom calls, were deeply encouraged. A few weeks ago, we heard two beautiful testimonies shared by Adele Trout and John Witmer. I heard from many of you how impactful it was to hear those testimonies.

But here’s the challenge of Psalm 147: we are to bring testimony about who God is and what God has done and is doing out to the world—outside of our church Zoom meetings and worship. In general, as Presbyterians, well, we’re not exactly the church tradition that excels at giving testimonies. Am I right? Some of us may actively resist it. But stop and consider: for a world that desperately needs to hear the good news; for our neighbors and our community, will we, as individuals and as a community of faith, actively seek to grow in our public testimony about God? Will we allow God to convict us to take up this practice, however awkward it may feel, as an element of our “hub and spoke” model and our mission of “caring, sharing, and growing God’s love in our communities”?

Psalm 147 provides a challenge but also a comfort. The comfort comes to us as we round the corner towards a full year of suffering under the pandemic. The psalm ends with two notes of reminders, which are meant to encourage and comfort.

The first note of comfort and encouragement is that the greatest delight of God is not in those with physical power and strength—not, for instance, in the athletic prowess to be demonstrated at the Superbowl, but in imperfect followers of Jesus, like you and me, who trust in God and hope in the steadfast love and mercy of God. God takes delight in us as we find our

hope in God. All of the testimonies that I have heard from you, expressing your hope that God's got us, that God is with us, whether you've shared this privately or publicly, God is delighted in your firm faith and steadfast hope. Take comfort in God's delight in you.

The second note. Well, let's first name some realities. Yes, we are yearning to re-gather for in-person worship and ministry, to once again sing our praises and play our instruments with abandon together again. Yes, we have seen great strides in treatments and vaccines. Yes, some of us in this congregation have already received our first shot. A few more already have received both. Some have an appointment for a shot soon or are waiting for a call from the doctor. Some are still trying to make progress navigating the options that seem not to be working or available yet. But, still, we all know that we are far from out of the woods. Because the pandemic is still raging worse than it ever was even three or six months ago. In the midst of this, at times, excruciating time of extended isolation, fear, suffering, boredom, difficulties, and more, Psalm 147 reminds us that in the midst of our waiting, we can keep hope because God's love is steadfast, come rain or shine. A God who knows each star by name in the vastness of stars, knows each of our names, knows the names of all those we have lost, knows the names of all who will come after. God's vastness "covers" all things... all the pain, all the waiting, all the hope. So, we stay in love with the God who loves us. We take this day, says, the Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber, as the only one we have. After all, this is the day the Lord has made, the one the Lord has given to us, the one the Lord has promised to be with us in. Let us rejoice in what there is to rejoice in, and be glad for what there is to be glad for. After all, Psalm 147 has shown us that there actually is a whole lot! Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Amen.