

“Praise in the Chaos”

Sermon by Vicar Kevin Tracey

October 20, 2019, Pentecost 19

2 Samuel 5:1-5; 6:1-5 | Psalm 150 | (Mark 11:8-10)

Grace to you and Peace from God our Creator and our Lord Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

As some of you may know, Marty and I lead a Bible Study at the Knollwood Retirement community on Wednesday. Since there’s two of us, we alternate weeks. So, every other week I head over to Knollwood with a bag of bulletins and hymn print outs and lead a small group through a bible study and hymn sing. And I’m pretty sure that they’d be totally fine if we only sang—that’s definitely the highlight for everyone.

It was my turn to go this week and to be honest, I didn’t really feel like going. Wednesday was rainy and dreary, and I was tired. The last thing I felt like doing that day was driving over to Knollwood to talk through the lessons from last week.

And, on top of that, I was running late and sort-of stumbled in apologetically, feeling wildly unprepared; but we made it through the lessons—the whole time, I felt like I was constantly going off-track. But, we made it.

Then we started singing. And we sang “Blessed Assurance,” when the refrain goes
*“This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Savior all the day long”*

And to my left, an elderly woman had started crying, her glasses were fogged up and she had a tissue crumpled up in her hand, the biggest smile I’ve ever seen lighting her face up.

Praise looks like a lot of things—And often shows up in unexpected ways, in unexpected moments. That moment was holy—it was God’s presence showing up in an unexpected way, breaking into the ordinary day, and demanding to be seen—reminding me that praise—that God’s presence—is going to look like a whole like of different things. A reminder that praise takes on a variety of forms.

Today, in our 2 Samuel readings, we get a taste of what praise can look like. We open with David’s anointing as king over Israel. And it’s a joyous occasion—his new status is celebrated, and the people rejoice in the work that God is doing. They celebrate that David has led them during the reign of Saul and now, David has been called to lead all the people of Israel and Judah.

And in our second reading, again we enter into a time of praise and rejoicing. David dances before the Lord, and with shouting and the sounds of the trumpet, the ark continues on its journey into Jerusalem, the city of David. The people dance and rejoice and sing praise to God because everything is finally working out!

Except it’s not.

See, in the time between our two readings today—the portion we don’t hear this morning—David and his armies march against the Jebusites and the Philistines, groups of people that God has given David permission to conquer and destroy

And after the ark begins its journey toward Jerusalem, Uzzah is struck down for touching the ark; and later when David dances in the street, Michal, daughter of Saul sees him, and she is cursed with a barren womb. So yes, these are stories of praise and thanksgiving—but they are set in the midst of loss, violence, and chaos.

The point of this portion of 2 Samuel is to tell the story of the progression of the ark—a journey that has been fraught with dangers and setbacks. The ark is delayed, and people die.

But it is a journey that is still full of praise; praise while surrounded by chaos. The people of God continue to praise God in the midst of these troubles and challenges.

Praise in the midst of chaos. Praise that persists, that endures, that shows up in spite of everything and demands space—demands to be seen—praise that breaks into the ordinary day. Just like the praise I experienced on Wednesday at Knollwood.

But I have to be honest—our current world doesn't really leave a lot of room for praise. I've been struggling to feel this praise authentically. Our world is chaotic—a messy, human-driven thing full of all the complications that come along with that. This week alone, here in Washington, has been—overwhelming—to say the least. And then any time we turn on the news and its more violence, more tragedy, more death, events abroad and at home continue to bombard us with reminders of the messy world we live in:

Events like the October 12th shooting of Atatiana Jefferson, an unarmed black woman who was shot inside her home by a local police officer. And the devastating affects her death has had on her family and her community of Fort Worth, proving again that racism and prejudice is very much alive and well in the fabric of our American society—as the cries of “black lives matter” and “say her name” continue to be necessary

Or statistics like that since last Sunday, there have been 4 reported mass shootings. That's out of the 361 that have occurred in 2019 and we're only on the 288th day of the year.

And I'm sure we could each share our own chaos—broken relationships, financial struggles, chronic illness, the things each one of us faces on a day to day basis. And all of this is the context for our praise; with all of the messiness and the chaos of life, we are somehow, in some way, called to express our praise.

Somehow, in the midst of this chaos and turbulence and all the awful stuff that's happening in our world, we're called to sing praise anyway.

That seems pretty impossible right now. And I really wish I had some grand wrap up for you that could somehow make it ok. I sat with this for a while this week, trying to figure how to point to the good news of this story.

Perhaps we can find it in our Gospel passage today—as Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem. After all, this is God-incarnate, who triumphantly entered into the City of David, knowing that death was approaching. In the midst of the chaos and the turmoil... the coming pain, humiliation, and death, there was still space and breath to shout praises.

Or perhaps in the life and work of Elijah Cummings, whose powerful voice crossed boundaries and spoke truth into broken places...

Or maybe in new relationships, in conversation over coffee with friends, in the life of a new baby, in the sounds of a really great choir anthem, here in this community, or even in something as simple as bread and wine.

A reminder that in the midst of the chaos, praise can still happen. Our voices can still rise up in song because God is just as present in the chaos as in the order—there in the center of the worst of it, is God. Among the ashes, among the brokenness, among the pain and the hurt, is God, present and caring, pouring God's-self out into this broken world, reminding us that death and destruction do not have the last say but that God will and is bringing order and healing into the chaos of this world.

And that is good news.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.