

Psalms as Living Prayers
“Praise for the Everyday: Awakening to Beauty”

Psalm 145

Message for July 17, 2022

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Psalm 145 expresses gratitude and praise. The dictionary defines praise as an “expression of approval or admiration for someone or something.”

Praise is an entry point to awe, and it flows from gratitude. Through praise, I become aware of what I am grateful for and notice the beauty of the world, of the situation, of the person in front of me is revealed.

The dictionary defines prayer as “a solemn request for help or expression of thanks addressed to God or an object of worship.”

Prayer is actually quite simple, but we often get in our own way in the practice of prayer. Richard Rohr writes that “the purpose of the exploration of prayer is not to get anywhere. We Western people are goal-oriented consumers, and we can’t imagine doing anything that won’t get us something. But with full deliberation, we need to understand our exploration is not an effort to get anywhere.” Rohr argues, “We’re already there. We cannot attain the presence of God because we’re already totally in the presence of God. What’s absent is awareness.”

We do not naturally see; we tend to be sleep-walkers. We go about our days almost hypnotically – one foot in front of the other – coping, striving, achieving, failing, trying again. We need to be taught how to see, and that is what religion and our spiritual lives is for – to learn how to see, to wake up, to become aware.

If we think more deeply about living prayer – living into our prayers, praying into our lives – ultimately it is not about the words we say but about how we *SEE*. We become aware of the Presence and we rest inside that presence – we trust and delight in it. We are present to the Presence.

That long, loving look into the Real that Richard Rohr describes – this is what the psalmist today sings. We hear: “On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.” This is a moment

of awareness and intention. Recognizing the Mystery, noting that God's "greatness is unsearchable," enables us to be present to the Presence without expecting easy answers or a full understanding. We are invited to *be* and not expected to "figure it out."

Psalm 145 is understood to be one of the best examples among the psalms that uplifts creation as an expression of equilibrium, coherence, and reliability. Creation may be complex, and God may not be knowable, but the Creator can be trusted and should be praised. There is no plot, no real movement in the form of this "orientation psalm," but this static framework in which this psalm was written is a statement of Israel's exuberant and grateful confidence in God the Creator. This Psalm, in essence, articulates what is enduringly true of the world.

In a world filled with uncertainties and chaos, it is a gift and necessity to awaken to eternal truths and to root oneself in God's steadfast and abounding love. There is beauty amidst death and pain. There is splendor and wonder even as we struggle. In the practice of awareness the veil is lifted. The gifts of this world, the beauty, the joy, the glimmering thread of the divine that is woven throughout everything and everyone becomes visible.

Ultimately, Psalm 145 celebrates the world's beauty and the abiding presence of God. This is a "thank you" prayer. Just as Anne Lamott points out to us the three essential prayers of "Help, Thanks, Wow," we see the ways that this communication with God brings us into closer relationship with God, creation, ourselves, one another. We are brought more fully into the rhythms and seasons of our lives as we make room for all the beauty and all the pain. Anne Lamott points out that as we open ourselves to revelation/truth about what is unfolding around us and within us, we can find a way to the "balm of gratitude."

You may have heard, in this praise-filled and peaceful psalm, a surprising verse: "God watches over all who love God, but all the wicked God will destroy." Oh dear. My peace has been disturbed. Did we have to bring up destruction and wickedness? But even here, at this point in the psalm, if we look more deeply, we can see that love is at the center.

And how do we love God? By loving others and loving creation and loving ourselves. This is not exclusion – “God watches over all who love God.” That’s a pretty big tent that we all can rest under. Each of us finds ways to love God, whether or not we use that language or think about it in that way. When we love, we are watched over. When we are hurt or disillusioned or flawed, we are still lovable and still capable of love. Love is at the center and God watches over all who love God.

When we hear “but all the wicked God will destroy,” we prick up our ears a bit. I don’t know about you, but I pretty quickly came up with a list of wicked people and evil actions that I would be happy to witness God destroying. And right on the heels of that, I realized: what a relief it would be to open myself up to having the wicked parts of me – the small, petty, hateful, spiteful things within me – destroyed. Yes, God, I am grateful for the love and the ability to pluck out, with precision, the wicked – all that is hurtful and damaging, everything and everyone that is hurting and broken. Yes please. Ouch. Okay. Thanks.

In this practice of prayer/contemplation/awareness/awakeness, we are opened to revelation. We are given the option to change, to shift, to do things differently. Anne Lamott tells us something we already know: “Revelation is not for the faint of heart.”

She says, “...if you gently help yourself back to the present moment, you see how life keeps stumbling along and how you may actually find your way through another ordinary or impossible day. Details are being revealed, and they will take you out of yourself, which is heaven, and you will have a story to tell, which is salvation that again and again saves us, the way Jesus saves some people, or the way sobriety does. Stories to tell or hear – either way, it’s medicine. The Word.”

In writing about gratitude, Lamott explains, “I say ‘Thanks,’ because revelation has shown me things that are miserable that somehow I may get to sidestep; or that are miserable but that prayer and friends help me find a way through; or that are painful and beautiful in ways that make your heart ache, that draw you closer forever to the comrades who have walked with you.”

We all know that revelation is not easy and can be painful. She goes on to write, “Without revelation and reframing, life can seem like an endless desert of danger with scratchy sand in your shoes, and yet if we remember or are reminded to pay attention, we find so many sources of hidden water, so many bits and chips and washes of color, in a weed or the gravel or a sunrise. There are so many ways to sweep the sand off our feet. So we say, ‘Oh my God. Thanks.’”

This is a powerful practice. The psalmist sings, “My mouth will speak the praise of God, and all flesh will bless God’s holy name for ever and ever.” In the midst of the pain, the revelation, the truth of the mixed bag which is my life, I will stay awake to the beauty, to the opportunity for growth. I will be alert to what I might learn and open to stepping onto another path leading me to deeper awareness and appreciation.

So, as we think about the seasons of our lives – of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation – let us pay close attention to the moments of orientation that cycle through our lives and consider what we can gain from such periods of stability. Walter Brueggemann tells us that “The most foundational experience of orientation is the daily experience of life’s regularities, which are experienced as reliable, equitable, and generous.” These periods of equilibrium allow us to see the blessings all around us.

Let us celebrate creation, revel in the joyful realities of friendship and connection, and freely express our gratitude for all that is good. Amen.