

“Making a Racket”

They call it, “the grand finale.” It is not just the end of a performance. It’s a climactic event. I associate the grand finale with the Fourth of July -- not in Elkhart, Indiana, but in Boston. At the conclusion of an outdoor concert attended by thousands, the Boston Pops orchestra performs Tchaikovsky’s stirring “1812 Overture,” complete with the blasts of Army Infantry canons and brilliant, breath-taking pyrotechnics. The orchestra, canons, and fireworks make a delightful racket.

Grand finales end with a BANG! not a whimper. Number 150 is the grand finale to the book of Psalms. The closer to the end you get, the louder the racket. The final word about God and our response to God calls for full-throated and whole-hearted worship.

The mood of Psalm 1 is decidedly contemplative. *“Blessed are those who sit not in the seat of scoffers, but who meditate on the law of the Lord day and night (Psalm 1: 1-2).”* The mood of Psalm 150 is decidedly not. Number 1 is reflective. Number 150 is raucous racket!

The first word of this psalm is repeated thirteen times in six verses. It is, *“Halelu-Yah!”* which translates, *“Praise-Yah.”* The suffix “Yah” is the oldest form of the name of God. It is short for “Yahweh.” From start to finish this psalm is about total praise. The word “praise” can also mean *radiate* and *reflect*, as in living in such a manner that we radiate and reflect the love of God.

“Praise the Lord!” Psalm 150 begins. There is only one God worthy of praise -- the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. “Praise the Lord in his sanctuary.” Worship happens when God’s people gather in the Temple to praise God’s holy name.

“Praise him for his mighty deeds according to his exceeding greatness.” Praise belongs to God alone who created the heavens and earth; who revealed his promise to father Abraham and his descendants; who called Moses to deliver the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt; the God who gave the Law, sustained his people forty years in the wilderness, and led them to the Promised Land.

Praise isn’t a response limited to worship. We praise whatever inspires us and enthuses us and stirs our passions.

On Monday night I served my wife an artfully plated entree of pan-seared sea scallops wrapped in peppered bacon, seasoned with sea salt and *Emeril’s Essence*. With the first bite, Sue sang praises to my culinary skills. I accepted said praise... humbly, of course.

We praise what inspires and enthuses us. Someone said, “The essence of praise is *advertising*.” In praising someone or something we express our approval. Praise is an endorsement. “Let me tell you about an amazing book I read.” “You simply must try the new Mexican restaurant downtown. It puts the Hacienda to shame!” “I want to introduce you to a remarkable person I can’t say enough good things about.”

Whether God is praised in moments of personal devotion or corporate worship, we approve, commend, endorse. We lose ourselves by making a racket for God who is before all, above all, in all, through all, and for all. Well, some folks make a racket.

You may recall an old song titled, “*Mama Don’t Allow*.” It goes:

***Mama don’t allow no banjo playin’ around here.
Mama don’t allow no banjo playin’ around here.
We don’t care what Mama don’t allow,
We’re gonna’ play that banjo anyhow!
Mama don’t allow no banjo playin’ around here.***

Since this is the 300th anniversary year of our denomination its important to look from whence we have come. Studying the practice of worship you learn that we had a “Brethren Don’t Allow” rule governing it. I doubt the Brethren elders preached much from Psalm 150 because it endorsed practices they prohibited. “Praise him with trumpets!” No trumpets allowed. “Praise him with lute and harp!” No lutes or harps allowed... and no guitars, either. “Praise him with strings and pipes!” No strings or pipes or drums or crashing cymbals allowed. And God forbid, NO DANCING! The only instrument allowed was the voice.

The Brethren are content to give Psalm 150 to the Pentecostals and other exuberent churches. Let them get worked up and praise God with all the racket they want. We’ll quietly contemplate Psalm 1. *Blessed are those who walk not in the way of sinners, but delight in the law of the Lord* (Psalm 1: 1-2).

I had lunch with George DeGeeter on Friday. Since I paid for it I felt entitled to siphon sermon material from him. I asked George what the word “praise” brings to mind. He said, “I think of worshipping with a group of believers with whom it is safe to express what I feel toward God, without concern over their reaction if I sing off key or jump for joy.”

I found some interesting statistics for you to consider. Seventy percent of all Christians alive today live outside of North American and Western Europe. During the past century in Latin America, Asia, and Africa the church has grown by 1,100%. Today, 27,000 people will become Christians -- the vast majority in places other than North America and Europe. At this moment, Christians in different cultures are worshipping God in ways different from ours. There will be singing and dancing in services lasting four hours with two-hour sermons! (Think about that when I go three minutes over the twenty-minute mark!)

These Christians delight in praising God with hands in the air and knees on the floor to the accompaniment of horn and pipes, and drums and strings and keyboards, and pots and pans, and

garbage can lids. As they make a racket praising God, the Lord delights in their delight.

Are we willing to make a racket? Will we delight in praise and will God delight in our delight? Will we realize there are more ways to praise and worship God than our way, and be willing to be stretched to praise in new ways? Will we expend the same energy singing as our musicians expend practicing and playing their best to glorify God? Will we subordinate our preferences and tastes to learn *new dimensions* of praise, minus the critique - too new or too old, too fast or too slow, too loud or too soft, too highbrow or too earthy, too much like rock or too much like gospel, too much this or too much that?

I recall the night when the Los Angeles Dodger's ace pitcher, Orel Herhiser was a guest on Johnny Carson's "Tonight Show." The Dodgers had just won the 1989 World Series, and Johnny asked Hershiser how he kept himself calm before games and in between innings. Being a man of faith, Orel said he sang hymns. Carson then made an unscripted request -- "Will you sing a hymn for the audience?" Johnny seemed taken aback when Hershiser began singing. "*Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures here below...*" It was obvious that he didn't have a singing voice, but when he finished, there was a moment of silence and then a round of appreciative applause from the audience. It was obvious by the expression on Johnny Carson's face that he was moved by this simple, sincere, heartfelt expression of praise.

The grand finale of the Psalms declares the best response to God for all his love and kindness shown to us. "*Let everything that breathes praise the Lord*" (Psalm 150: 6).

Let every instrument be tuned for praise.

Let all rejoice who have a voice to raise!

And may God give us faith to sing always -- Alleluia! Amen!