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**FIFTH SUNDAY OF PENTECOST**

**July 13, 2014**

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## **“Praise Awaits You, O God”**

*(Psalm 65)*

Rev. David K. Groth

*“Where morning dawns and evening fades you call  
forth songs of joy” (Psalm 65:8).*

## **Collect of the Day**

Blessed Lord, since You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever **Amen**

Back in Delavan, in my home congregation, one of our members was a farmer who often served as an usher at the 8:00 am service. Receiving our bulletins, my parents would pause and ask how his crops were doing. His answer was always the same. He'd shake his head and say, "Not well. Not well at all." Things were either too wet, too dry, too cold or too hot. Every year it seemed his crops were on the front edge of disaster. In a year like this, he would ignore how well the corn was growing; would have nothing to say about that, but would go on about how soft the hay fields were, too soft to get the equipment in. He set himself up as the perpetual victim of God's poor weather choices. With all those droughts, floods, hail, frost and a plagues and blights, it's a wonder he survived as a farmer . . . for some fifty plus years.

I bring this fellow up because I can see myself in him. Financially, at Good Shepherd, our backs are up against the wall. I worry and stew about that while failing to give thanks for or even think about the good things that are and have been happening.

I wasn't able to find it but I remember reading a quote from Martin Luther. He knew he had much for which to be grateful. Yet all it took was one little kidney stone strategically placed by the devil, and his whole sense of gratitude was ruined. That can happen to us. If we let it, things like arthritis, back pain, insomnia . . . if we let them they will make us forget how blessed we are and will also rob us of any sense of gratitude, which is too bad, in part because it's one of the most pleasant and holy emotions in our repertoire.

We do have the tendency, you know, to fixate on and embellish our hardships. It's sort of like watching World Cup Soccer where a minor foul is turned into a death performance. The player falls to the ground screaming, writhing, pounding the grass with his fists, gesturing the sidelines for a stretcher. Just when you think someone should call in a priest to administer last rites, the

player stands up, shakes it off, and is back in the game, full throttle. We too tend to embellish our hardships. Remember how God heard the complaints of his people in Egypt and had mercy on them. He freed them from slavery and brought them out. Yet at the first sign of trouble, they forget all that and the refrain becomes “Were there not enough graves in Egypt that you had to bring us out here to die?” Where’s the faith in that? Where’s the gratitude?

Well, to our text: Psalm 65 is a psalm of gratitude. We can’t address every verse, just a few beginning with verse 1, “Praise awaits you, O God.” That is, praise is due you. We haven’t praised you enough. The first reason for praise and thanksgiving is cited in verse three, “When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions.” Maybe the author, David, was thinking of his own personal sins against Bathsheba and Uriah and against God and how overwhelming his guilt and shame. Or maybe when he speaks of sin overwhelming us, David was just taking the nature of sin seriously, knowing that the wages of sin is death. Therefore sin sooner or later overwhelms us all. Knowing what we know about sin, knowing what we know about everlasting death, just hearing the words of absolution alone should be enough to bring us back week after week to the Lord’s house. He has, after all, defeated our greatest enemies (sin, death, and the devil). The first response of a Christian, before anything else, (before serving on a board, before giving a dime), the first response is simply feeling the relief of having been rescued by God, and then the gratitude and praise that is always close on its heels.

Even if the hay field is under water, and you don’t have a dime to your name, and your gall bladder looks more like a gravel pit, you can still give thanks and praise to the Lord, and not just lip service, but heartfelt, for the Lord has defeated your sin and death. You are his baptized child. Heaven is your home. “Praise awaits you, O God. . . When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions.”

Verse 4, “Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts! We are filled with the good

things of your house, of your holy temple.” That makes me think of Word and Sacrament ministry. “We are filled with the good things of your holy temple.” It makes me think of the Prodigal Son coming home to a feast ordered up by a loving, forgiving, even exuberant Father. It makes me think of the prophecy of Isaiah, “On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever . . . and wipe away the tears” (Isaiah 25:6). “Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts.”

In verse 8 of our psalm David writes, “Where morning dawns and evening fades you call forth songs of joy.” Think of planet earth turning on its axis which is tilted at 23 degrees as it orbits around the sun. One side is being warmed by the sun, the other cooled by darkness. Think of that front edge of the day, where darkness is turning into light, where the morning dawns and the birds sing their heads off and, in every language, many of God’s people at least are greeting the day with their prayers and praises. And then on the other side of the day, where evening fades and people are bedding down for the night. . . again, in different languages, God’s people are turning their attention to him with thanks and praise. “Where morning dawns and evening fades you call forth songs of joy.”

Verse 9, “You visit the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly.” Not so the kings of the earth. When they visit the land with their armies they strip it like locusts. They help themselves to the silos and cellars and lay waste to the orchards and flocks. When armies advance or retreat they take with them or destroy anything the enemy might make use of. It’s called the “scorched earth policy” and the ancient Romans did it. William Tecumseh Sherman did it with his March to the Sea. Joseph Stalin did it, and retreating Iraqi troops did it to the oil wells in Kuwait. But when the King of kings visits the land, he cares for it and

enriches it abundantly.

Going on with verse 9, “The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain . . . You drench its furrows and level its ridges; you soften it with showers and bless its crops. You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance.” Isn’t it remarkable that year after year, the soil around us is so willing to produce? The tomato plants and cucumbers have traction now and are growing like mad. God designed them to give us food to eat, and they will, so much so that in a couple of months, some of us will be relieved when those plants finally peter out.

“You drench its furrows and level its ridges. You soften it with showers.” These things happen all the time, so much so that we grow blind to them and fail to give thanks for them and may even grumble and complain about them. Martin Luther wrote, “They neither praise nor give thanks . . . they are used to them . . .” They say, “Is that such a great thing that the sun shines, or fire warms, or water gives fish, or the earth yields grain, or a cow calves, or a woman bears children, or a hen lays eggs? That happens every day!” To which Luther says, “My dear Mr. Simpleton, is it a small thing just because it happens every day? If the sun did not shine for ten days, then it would be a great thing. If there were no fire on earth except at one place, then, I think, it would be more precious than all the gold and silver in the world. If there were only one well in all the world, then I imagine that a drop of water would be worth more than a hundred thousand gulden . . . But it is a discouraging thing that men are so damnably ungrateful and blind. God showers upon them such great and rich miracles, and they do not consider even one of them or thank Him for it. But if some clown shows up who can walk a tightrope or who has monkeys to display, him they admire and praise, and exalt. Therefore the psalmist says here that the works of God are great, but only in the eyes of the upright” (AE 13:367).

Then comes the last verse of our psalm, “The meadows are covered with flocks and the valleys are mantled

with grain; they shout for joy and sing.” In the exuberant language of the psalmists, all creation, even inanimate objects, can join their voices to ours and celebrate the goodness of God in creation and redemption. Nature has a voice with which it can also praise its Creator. Psalm 98, “Let the sea resound, and everything in it . . . Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy” (vv.7-8).

This psalm in the middle of July reminds us that giving thanks is not just for a weekend or a season. For the Christian it’s a way of life. It’s our resting state. Sure there are challenges. Illness and death, poverty and war, fear and dread. But over all these things, surpassing them is the love of God in Jesus Christ from which nothing can separate us. So we make our choices. Are we going to focus on our hardships, or his blessings?

One last illustration: At my former congregation in St. Louis, there was an elderly man. He was a crank and a malcontent. He didn’t like me or my preaching or the music or the other people. Truthfully, he had a lot on his plate. He could only shuffle about with the help of a walker. His back was severely hunched; he was in chronic pain. After the service, at the door I would ask him how he was doing, and he would look up at me and out of the side of his mouth he’d snarl. “Peachy . . . juuuust peachy!” He was small, frail and elderly, but he was frightening, like he came out of a Charles Dickens novel.

I think of him whenever I run across one of our own members, Marian Blaney. She too can walk only with the assistance of a walker, which she often decorates with big, colorful plastic flowers. She too lives with chronic pain. She too routinely uses the word “peachy.” I saw her this last week and asked her, “How are you doing, Marian?” And she answered me *as she always does*, “Plum peachy, Pastor. How’s the Mrs?”

No matter our circumstances, there’s still room for praise. “Praise is due you, O God . . . When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions . . .

You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly . . .  
you drench its furrows and level its ridges you soften it with  
showers and bless its crops . . . Where morning dawns and  
evening fades you call forth songs of joy.” Amen.

