

Soul Refresher: How Great Thou Art  
Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost  
October 20, 2019  
Psalm 96:1-9  
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

Psalm 96:1-9 (NRSV) Praise to God Who Comes in Judgment

- <sup>1</sup> O sing to the LORD a new song;  
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
- <sup>2</sup> Sing to the LORD, bless his name;  
tell of his salvation from day to day.
- <sup>3</sup> Declare his glory among the nations,  
his marvelous works among all the peoples.
- <sup>4</sup> For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;  
he is to be revered above all gods.
- <sup>5</sup> For all the gods of the peoples are idols,  
but the LORD made the heavens.
- <sup>6</sup> Honor and majesty are before him;  
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.
- <sup>7</sup> Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,  
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
- <sup>8</sup> Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;  
bring an offering, and come into his courts.
- <sup>9</sup> Worship the LORD in holy splendor;  
tremble before him, all the earth.

Our walks to follow Jesus can sometimes feel more like a strenuous workout than a casual stroll in the park.

Jesus didn't ever say it would be easy, but

...getting up early to spend time in God's word...

...getting together with others, sometimes a couple (or more) times a week...

...THEN treating our coworkers and neighbors with kindness EVEN WHEN THEY DON'T TREAT US KINDLY...

...nope. NOT a walk in the park.

Our faithful obedience to God's calling—to love God and love others—often doesn't lead to immediate, visible results either!

But then, there are those moments...

...when a random conversation turns into an opportunity of sharing how God's love has affected US.

...you're able to share that Jesus Christ is the Lord of your life...

...a sermon references (or, I know *THIS* happens) or your devotional talks about the very. Same. Verse. That you've been studying.

How 'bout when there's a beautiful sunset after a difficult day?

Or someone smiles at you...or touches your arm...just loves you for no reason.

Moments like those remind us of the greatness of our heavenly Father.

How can we response to God's greatness?

Well, like the rest of this sermon series we can turn to our focus hymn: "How Great Thou Art." When I sing it as a solo (and as we all sing it in just a few minutes) I imagine in my mind (oh, THAT can be exciting) the stars and the thunder that Pastor Carl Gustaf Boberg wrote about. Here's his inspiration:

Carl and some friends were walking home from an afternoon service.

A sudden thunderstorm got their attention.

Then, just as suddenly, the storm was over!

A rainbow appeared and when Carl threw open his window, the lake mirrored the sky and a nearby church, which had held a funeral, had it's bells ringing a favorite Swedish hymn. The sights and sounds inspired Pastor Carl to fall to his knees in worship...and write what we know as "How Great Thou Art."

Or, instead of a hymn, we can turn to God's word where we find the psalms – many of which are glorious poetry that worship the goodness and greatness of God.

Kim read earlier, from Psalm 96: "*For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;*" (Psalm 96:4)

**We** are SO blessed in Colorado to observe God's work.

Wouldn't you agree that God's box of crayons is incredible?

Golden aspen. Colorado blue skies. I know that Alice and Don probably witnessed some beauty of the hardwoods in the Northeast while they were on their trip last

month. I miss Iowa's hardwoods, too. Or when we head west into Utah or south to New Mexico or Arizona and we can see the colors of the desert. Or the ocean front on either coast.

I don't know where every one of you has encountered breathtaking moments of God's handiwork, but we remember them when we allow our AWARENESS of God's goodness and power.

Those times may come and go like the tides, but God is always good.

God is always powerful.

God is always ALWAYS worthy of our praise.

Listen, God's character is not lessened when our attention lags.

From the moments when God Created the world...and all the yesterdays of history and all the tomorrows to come, God's power is the same on a mundane Monday as it is in the midst of a booming thunderstorm.

*"God is infinite, and we'll never fully understand God's greatness—not on this side of eternity," Billy Graham once wrote. "God is the awesome, holy, all-powerful God who created the heavens and the earth. God is far greater than anything (or anyone) we can ever imagine."*

While our human brains can't fully comprehend God, when we do acknowledge...when we are aware...when we recognize God's greatness we gain *"strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow"* which are lyrics from ANOTHER great hymn.

What can WE do to respond to God's goodness and greatness?

Well, we're here... in worship.

It's a good place to start in responding to God.

Sometimes, there are moments in worship with you, that I *"feel"* the Holy Spirit moving in this place. I get warm. My skin prickles. It doesn't happen every Sunday but I can tell you that my drive home the car becomes a chapel of loud and

excited praise. I can't help but react. (Pastor Gene's usually not in the car those days.)

Other times, I think you feel it too, our natural reaction to God is a lot like Pastor Carl before he wrote today's hymn – of being moved to drop to our knees – not in supplication but in worship. Don't hold back if you are so moved. The rest of us will be blessed with the infusion of worship for our time together! It'll be like that day in the New Heaven when the elders are gathered around God's throne and all they can do is worship and praise!

Or you writers and journal keepers: When you experience God's awesome character, give praise in your writing. It may be prayer. Or who knows, the words to another great hymn.

All these things are a way to **worship** the greatness of God.

Another thing we can do is **remember**.

We don't do that often enough...we're forgetful about praising God's greatness.

God's people in the Old Testament went through cycles when they'd forget and they'd fall into sin. They even spent 40 years wandering in the desert before they were allowed into the Promised Land.

Again you journal keepers – help us record God's goodness.

Those of you who like to take pictures – grab your camera (or your cell phone) and keep track of when you experience God in a personal way.

Like Scripture, or a good hymn, those notes and photos can be a help when we lapse into a difficult season of our lives...will help us to remember God's power and goodness.

We also have to **stay alert**.

Don't be complacent.

Don't be lazy.

When something catches your eye, or your ear, or your heart, let your awareness be raised that God is present in that moment.

Are we being intentional to give God credit for “every good gift and every perfect gift” (it says in James (1:17)?

We can’t get too content. So, go ahead and ask God to help you spot the gifts God is placing around you. Be alert and keep watch.

And finally, for today:

Remember Jesus talking to the Pharisees in Luke’s version of the Palm Sunday story. The Pharisees wanted the crowd to be quieted. They were calling out and proclaiming

*“Blessed is the king  
who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”*

Jesus told those Pharisees *“I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”* (19:40)

Don’t be silenced!

If stones will call out the glory of God – WE NEED TO DO IT TOO!

When we notice God at work around us, share that with somebody! Maybe a friend over coffee *needs* to hear how God is working in *your* life. Maybe someone at the dinner table (Thanksgiving is coming – there’ll be a lot of relatives there...) *should* hear the message of God’s love working in you.

What are we holding back from?

As United Methodists, we are part of a mission statement that says we are **to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.**

Huh.

If we leave it to the stones to cry out and proclaim the glory of God do you think that people YOU are in touch with will get the message?

Proclaim God’s goodness, Dear Ones!

And I’ll leave you with this story from George Beverly Shea who was the musical mainstay of Billy Graham’s Crusades.

In 1957 the Crusade was in New York City (Manhattan!) It was the longest stay of all the crusades – **16 weeks (4 months in one place)!** George Beverly Shea sang “How Great Thou Art” **99 times** in those sixteen weeks!

He shared in his book Then Sings My Soul this:

*“Singing any number that often can sometimes cause us to lose the full impact of the words. I remember one night toward the end of the Madison Square Garden meeting when my weariness got the best of me.*

*In my room that night, I had a talk with the Lord: ‘Father, please forgive me for my apathy in singing that great hymn this evening,’ I prayed. ‘I promise it won’t happen again.’ And it hasn’t.”*

DON’T STOP SINGING OR WRITING OR PHOTOGRAPHING.

DON’T STOP REMEMBERING and...

DON’T STOP PROCLAIMING.

Maybe we, too should pray for forgiveness of our apathy, because when we truly are worshipping God, our whole attention is on God:

- Who God is.
- How great God is.
- What God has done for us
- How much God loves us!

In other words: We’ll want to keep worshipping God because the focus of our minds and our hearts are completely on God.

That’s when we praise God as we should.

More importantly, that’s when we can grow closer TO God.

Be like the psalmist who wrote:

*“Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name” (Psalm 103:1).*

AMEN!

Let's give God the glory with our Soul Refresher, focus hymn. Will you please stand as you're able, in mind and body, and let's sing "How Great Thou Art." #77