

## Psalm 146

### Responding to God

Over the summer we have watched as athletes completed for our country at the Olympic and Para-Olympic games. Women on the Canadian team have dominated for our country in various sports, many bringing new heights and experience to their respective sport in our country. One highlight during the Olympics was when the Canadian Women's Soccer team won gold. Witnessing their overcoming was truly inspiring. We have also had opportunity to watch as the Canadian Women's Hockey team became IIHF World Champions defeating their long-standing opponents and friends of the USA hockey team as we savoured the win with them.

Some have called it the summer of Canadian Women. These moments had people cheering from their living rooms and in pubs in small groups. Normally the stadium and hockey arena would have been filled to capacity with cheering crowds, this time we had to be satisfied with knowing that many across the country had gathered and were cheering right along with one another.

We celebrate that which seems worthy of praise. We often see this kind of praise in sports, but it also happens in music when people clap and cheer for the music they have heard at a concert, making sure that the musicians know and experience our appreciation. It is easy to get caught up in praising those who have brought our emotions high or moved us in some way.

The last psalms in the book of Psalms are all praise songs to God. Praising God is a response to experiencing God's goodness, provision, and presence in our lives. Observing the breath-taking beginning or ending of a day in a sunrise or sunset, climbing a mountain to see the world from a different perspective, sitting by a calming stream or roaring waterfall, watching the leaves change colour from green to gold, orange, and red, can all bring a response of praise to God as we experience God in nature and the glorious and wonderful ways nature reflects the brilliance of our Creator leading us to praise.

The writer of the psalm, known as the psalmist, begins with "Praise the Lord!" All, everyone together, is called upon to praise God. We also seem to need a reminder to praise God as individuals. To praise God as long as we live, throughout our entire lives. Or as the psalmist say, "Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long."

It can be difficult remembering or even think about how God is present to us in all circumstances. In a time when we are headed into a nation-wide election, those who

engage in the process of discerning who we might vote for, listen to the promises of party leaders and local candidates. We put a lot of trust in those who will represent our needs and desires. We hope that they will bring our nation to a place of peace and prosperity, along with well-being for all. Now there are a lot of nuances when it comes to what people value and are looking for in their elected representatives, and we are more than encouraged to participate in the process. Thankfully in Canada we have the right to vote for who will take a seat in parliament.

With all of this, the psalm cautions us, “Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help. When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish.” This does not diminish our responsibility to participate in the voting process, but to remember that politicians come and go, they are not saviours, they are people like you and me, mortals, who too will die. We are reminded of the fact that those we vote for are as human as we are as almost everyone fails to follow through on their plans, sometimes because of their own decisions, sometimes because others work against their being able to do the good they wish to do. Over time many become enamoured by their own power and prestige.

As Christians, in times of elections and when making decisions, it may be helpful for us think of the people that God has a deep compassion for and actions that God would deem important to the well-being of all. Psalm 146 is thorough in listing what and who is important to God. Our God executes justice for the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. That seems pretty straight forward. It could be a pretty blanket statement that to see all people in the world stand proud, to not live in fear, to have an abundance of food for themselves and their families, would make for a more just and beautiful world.

The Psalm continues with, “The Lord sets the prisoners free.” This may cause some to exclaim – No Way! – yet remember this is about restoring people to wholeness and community, to right relationships with God, themselves, and others. There are already movements like restorative justice that aim to get people back into community and living whole and productive lives. In our time it is not likely that all will come to that place, but looking at the justice system, fixing the flaws, examining thinking and our society where there are disproportionate numbers of people from certain groups in jail cells, is all worthwhile work.

God is in the business of unbinding people who are bound by limitations, whether it be a jail cell, or blindness of heart, mind, or body, as well as those who are bowed down because of physical burdens or burdens of the heart.

The Lord loves the righteous. This group, the righteous, are part of the reconciling and restoring work of God. Hopefully this is the group in which all Christians can be found, where we are working to bring God’s promises and purposes to fruition in the world. Here at St. Andrew’s, we use three words to speak of how we are working to participate in God’s plans and desire for the world - Responding, Restoring, Rejoicing! It is our

hope that everything we do can be represented in these words and always in the way we bring healing and wholeness to those who are broken in spirit or need to be lifted up.

“The Lord watches over the strangers...upholds the orphan and the widow.” These two groups represent those who are marginalized and powerless, the people who seem to have few to no one to speak on their behalf, who are lonely, those without means and possibility. Remember this is written in a time when strangers were not often welcomed, and the orphan and the widow had to rely on the help and handouts of others to protect and care for them.

To translate this directly into our experience in the 21<sup>st</sup> century does not work, but it is a reminder that even today there are those who come to a new community, work, or family and are strangers to the circumstances they find themselves in and the people they are with. As well, there are still those who do not have the means nor the power to get themselves out of the situations they have found themselves in, whether it is of their own doing or the decisions made others, be it families, friends, work environments, or governments.

It is pretty easy to praise God in the good times and celebrate with others. It may be good practice to say aloud “Praise the Lord!” When in a crowd it has even more power as those words are spoken and celebrated together. Sadly, we often forget to praise God for the presence, love, forgiveness, and provision we receive in the big and little moments.

It may be more challenging to remember to praise God when things are tough, when we face illness or death, loss of work or family and friend relationship, when our bank accounts are always tight, or in the red. When arguments and hurt abound or we feel forgotten. May you find that even in those moments you can trust that God is near, present and available to you. Look for who God is sending to you, what God is providing for you. It is said, “Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God.” This is not necessarily a bubbly rejoicing happy, but in these times may be the reassuring refrain that “God with us.”

The God of Jacob refers to the fact that God covenants or promises to be with those who remember God is with them. God is not demanding our praise, but like all of us, desires that our response to God’s presence and provision be one of praise and love. The church is a place for that response to be experienced in community, we do it in prayer, in music and singing, in reading scripture, in working and celebrating together, in participating in the Lord’s supper of communion and making a commitment in baptism or confession of faith to the work of God in the world through the church and our responding, restoring, and rejoicing together with those who God has deep compassion for.

We hope in the Lord, hope for a day when all the struggle will be done, when the way of the wicked will be brought to ruin. When we can count on people to always work for the good of others, seeking the best for all not just a few. When sorrow and sickness will

end. May it be our desire to be people who work in partnership with God to bring heaven on earth in our time as we sing praise to God in our church, in our homes, and in our lives, trusting that we do not go alone. God is with us. Praise the Lord!