***Sermon Series: Experiencing God*Sermon #13: Praise God No Matter What**

II Chronicles 20:1-4, 13-14a, 12a, 18, 21-24, 26-30  
Mark 11:7-10   
Mark 14:26

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| **Slide** | **Sermon** |
| 1 | Title Slide |
| 2 | Today it is Palm Sunday, the day we recall Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. He rides on a donkey, symbolic of the Messiah. Everyone is excited except the religious leaders. The crowd goes wild for him and want to make him king. Everyone is praising God. And for a few moments we pause and hope that Jesus will proclaim and demonstrate his power and proclaim himself king and set the religious leaders straight. But Jesus and God have another plan. This praise is worthy of Jesus, but Jesus will show God’s glory in another way. There is something about praise that gives God honor but also brings forth God’s work in our lives. |
| 3 | In some of the time of deepest despair in my life, the only way out was to praise God! Now I know this is counter-intuitive, i.e. seems opposite from what we think needs to be done. For instance, when I lost Wade, now almost 14 years ago, I spent most of the next two years being mad at God and wondering how God could let that happen! I was overwhelmed with grief and would not let God comfort me. After all, God seemed to be my enemy! But as time passed, it was my church at that time that God worked through to help me. One of the ways they did that was to gather every week to worship and praise God. Many weeks my heart didn’t feel like praising God. But there I was, leading worship in the midst of people who had learned through their experiences that praising God was exactly what one needs in difficult times! So, week after week they held me up and over time helped me to learn through praising God I could let go of my anger and begin to see that God was there to help me; that God is not my enemy. God is the one who could help me get through such a loss! Praising God was a way to honor God and give thanks for his sustaining provision that was given me through my church.  When have you experienced great loss or been faced with something that you thought could be your utter destruction? How did or how do you handle such situations? |
| 4 | I recall in the mid 1990’s that I felt a strong call to focus my ministry on hospital chaplaincy. I was good at that as I worked 3 24-hour shifts/month in that ministry. I always received positive reviews from my supervisors as well as positive feedback from the people I served. So, I took that as a sign from God that I needed to make myself available to move into this area of ministry. The hospital where I was working was expanding its chaplaincy program and I had all the necessary training that I got 1-1/2 years after seminary (5 advanced units Pastoral Care Education). So, as a hospital job for chaplain was announced, I would apply for it. I was very confident that God was leading me.  1st job came open – I applied and was interviewed; it came down to me and another candidate – the other candidate was hired.  2nd job came open – again I applied and was interviewed; came down to me and another candidate. The other candidate was hired.  This continued through 5 different chaplain positions at that hospital. Another person was hired each time. There were no more chaplain positions. I was devastated because I just knew this was from God. And I knew I had the skills and experience to do a great job. After that experience, I have to say it was a while before I could praise God! I felt like God had left me.  As a result, I continued my service as an ordained minister of the UMC as a pastor of 2 small churches and doing campus ministry. The next year it was time to move, and I was appointed a fairly large (at least for me) United Methodist Church in Mooresville where I had the opportunity to preach to about 220 people each Sunday and to try to organize that church’s ministry. I received more salary than the chaplaincy job would have given. So, in a way it was better for me. But I felt stunned that I had misread God’s movement in my life. It was hard for me to praise God when it felt like God was not supporting me. But, as I moved forward and have praised God since then, God gave the congregation that I needed when the unimaginable happened to me: that of losing Wade. |
| 5 | The thing I want you to take from my two stories is that praising God no matter what happens to you honors God and helps you to re-enter that love relationship with God that you may have lost through the events that happened in your life.  You note that the Israelites under King Jehoshaphat was facing an enemy that could defeat them and take over Jerusalem. Practically speaking, Israel had no chance against such an enemy. The king and God’s chosen faced annihilation. But God heard their cries and told the king He was with them if they trust in Him and praise Him.  This time Israel believed God. They worshiped and prayed for God’s deliverance. On the day of battle, they did what God instructed. They sent people out front of the army to sing constant praise to God. That was their battle plan. On the outside, it would look like a foolish plan! But they were obedient and marched to battle singing praises to God. God did an amazing work that day, confusing the enemy and dividing groups within the invading enemy against one another. They killed each other off – God won the battle for Israel because God honored their praise.  In the gospel of Mark, as Jesus faced being betrayed and arrested, He and the disciples left the upper room after the Passover supper. Jesus led them in singing a hymn, praising God. It was in this praise that God helped Jesus prepare the disciples and himself for what was to come – the crucifixion.  Praise of God honors God and opens the door to God working powerfully in one’s life. Even though the disciples had their world destroyed by Jesus’ crucifixion, God held on to them so they could see the glory of Easter Sunday!  How has life thrown you experiences that call into question if God is even with you, much less feeling God will lead you through it? |
| 6 | One of the keys to dealing with these times of challenge, pain, suffering, feeling disconnected from God is to praise and worship God and trust Jesus to see you through it.  Usually, we do the opposite. Usually, we get mad at God and blame Him for not taking better care of us! We complain and moan and groan and protest, saying, “Where are you God?”.  But I want you to know what I have learned through experience and what Jesus teaches is that: when showing your faith in lifting up God in prayer and praise, God will show Himself to you. Prayer and praise will honor God and open your life to God’s providence and action in your life.  This happens over and over again in the stories of the Bible. It has happened many times in my life. And will happen in yours. So don’t give up on God! Even in your darkest times, continue to praise God and expect God to work through you to give you hope and triumph. Praising God in faithfulness will always give you victory, no matter what!  Where are you struggling today? Where are you losing your hope and are angry at God because the present and future looks bleak and absent of God?  Whatever your situation, hold your head high! Sing praise to God! Shout praise to the Almighty God who wants to give you victory, who wants to personally love you through your challenges! Trust in the Lord and God will meet you in the midst of your struggle!  So be like King Jehoshaphat and Israel who praised God and God gave them victory. Trust in Jesus that praise will help sustain you when your world turns upside down! Praise God no matter what you face. That will help you see God working where otherwise you will miss it. “Praise God through whom all blessings flow”!  Amen |