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Psalm 148

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Psalm 148

(RSV) (LW)

Introduction to Psalm 148

This Psalm, exhorting the entire creation in heaven and earth to praise the LORD, is a most appropriate Psalm for Easter. Easter completes the work of salvation and gives us just a glimpse of the new world God has prepared for those who love Him. "Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). That prospect calls forth our continual praise, in concert with the entire creation.

Vv. 1-6

¹ Praise the LORD!

**Praise the LORD *from the heavens*,
praise him in the heights!**

**² Praise him, all his angels,
praise him, all his host!**

**³ Praise him, sun and moon,
praise him, all you shining stars!**

**⁴ Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!**

**⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD!
For he commanded and they were created.**

**⁶ And he established them forever and ever;
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.**

The LORD's praise is to sound forth from all that He has created; indeed, the fact that all things receive their existence from the LORD is the basis for the joyful duty of all creation to praise their Maker (verse 5). Hence, because there is nothing that exists that the LORD has not created, this is a summons to universal praise of the LORD. To be God's creature is to owe Him praise.

Verse 6 states an important dimension of God's work of creation. When the Creator made the world, He "fixed bounds," that is, He created a dependable and orderly universe. If we speak of "immutable laws of nature," they are the underside of what, seen theologically, is the faithfulness of the Creator to His creational covenant (Genesis 9:8-17). The order, dependability, and reliability of the world we inhabit is, to the eyes of faith, God's attribute of faithfulness to his promises on display. Any disruption of that order is a fearful, apocalyptic prospect. There is good reason to fear such disruption, not only because it imperils our life, but also because it calls into question God's own dependability and power. You should notice that in the New Testament every reference to the new creation is explicitly or implicitly preceded by extraordinary signs in the heavens and in the earth. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, (make no mistake about that) but My Word shall not pass away" (Mark 13:31).

Vv. 7-12

- ⁷ Praise the LORD *from the earth*,
you sea monsters and all deeps,
⁸ fire and hail, snow and frost,
stormy wind fulfilling his command!
⁹ Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!
¹⁰ Beasts and all cattle,
creeping things and flying birds!
¹¹ Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!
¹² Young men and maidens together,
old men and children!**

Not only things in the heavens, but also all the earth, whether inanimate or animate, are to join in the hymn of praise. "With angels and archangels and all the company of heaven we (too) laud and magnify Thy glorious name."

- ¹³ Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his glory is above earth and heaven.**

The target of our praise is the Name of Yahweh (the LORD). As I have said many times in these Psalm studies, the name of Yahweh (formerly translated as Jehovah) is the name under which the God of heaven and earth, the Creator, reveals Himself as the powerful Savior God to His People (Exodus 3:14-15). That name alone is to be praised, because that name alone sits exalted in glory in the heavens. All others are sham gods, seductive imitations. We are not the first generation to have to engage the problem of pluralism, the competing claims of many gods and religions. Israel was plagued with the problem throughout their long history. The prophets showed us the way of an uncompromised and uncompromising allegiance to Yahweh as the only true God. See for example, 1 Kings 18:20-39, where the story of Eli-jah (=My God is JAH-weh!) ends in the refrain, "Yahweh, He is God, Yahweh, He is God." Or much later, see Isaiah 45:21b-22.

- ¹⁴ He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his saints,
for the people of Israel who are near to him.**

The "horn" of an ox, for example, was that animal's protection and defense. Hence it is in the literature of the Psalms a frequent metaphor for strength and deliverance. Then too there were four horn-shaped projections from the four corners of the old tabernacle and the later temple altars. These were the horns of the altar (an expression in liturgical use to this day), and these were declared to be an area of sanctuary (Exodus 29:12). Thus the LORD is not only a powerful deliverer, but also offers Himself as a place of asylum for His People.

The phrase, "praise for His saints," does not mean that the saints are to be praised, but that the LORD as a horn is the occasion for the praise that comes from the saints. The saints of the LORD

are the ones whom He has separated out from the rest of humanity for Himself, the people of his own, His chosen ones. That people is Israel. That is also the name of the Christian community in, e.g., Galatians 6:14-16 and 1 Peter 2:9-10.

Praise the LORD!

As the Psalm begins with a call to praise the LORD, so it ends with the repetition of the same exhortation.

The Prayer from the LBW to accompany Psalm 148:

God Most High, by your Word you created a wondrous universe, and through your Spirit you breathed into it the breath of life. Accept creation's hymn of praise from our lips, and let the praise that is sung in heaven resound in the heart of every creature on earth, to the glory of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

In the Hymn of Praise (Lutheran Book of Worship, pp. 60-61, or Lutheran Worship, pp. 161-163), note especially that we praise Christ, "whose blood set us free to be [the!] People of God," and that we exhort one another to "sing with all the People of God, and join in the hymn of all creation."

Walter E. Keller

April 30, 2000 – **The Second Sunday of Easter**