

Introduction

Why praise?

We are created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord.

(Ignatius, First Principle and Foundation, Spiritual Exercises)

The Westminster Confession says that the principle purpose of our lives is *to glorify God and to enjoy him forever!*

Long ago Aristotle said that when people do not feel loved, they seek to be admired (Vanier 2004:59). There is an emptiness in each of us that can only be filled with love.

When we feel empty, we fill ourselves up with substitutes. We all know our default positions, - the extra drink, chocolate, retail therapy.

So, why praise,reverence and serve?

Isn't that a bit of an ego-trip for God?

God doesn't 'want' our praise!

What God 'wants', is

- to lavish love, acceptance, grace on us.
- to invite us into the joy of relationship

It's **we** who are suspicious – it's **too simple!**

We are trained to be conditional.

I can only be loved if....

I am good girl/good boy.

But even the animals, the birds, the earth know differently.

Job, in all his troubles, said:

Just ask the animals, and they will teach you.

Ask the birds of the sky, and they will tell you.

Speak to the earth, and it will instruct you.

Let the fish in the sea speak to you. (Job 12:7-10).

Encounter in the ordinary

Jesus came into our ordinary human situation and showed us the overflowing generosity of God.

Jesus first revealed his glory at an ordinary, human event, a wedding reception within spitting distance of home – Cana could be seen from Nazareth.

Jesus showed up at the wedding with his 5 newly-chosen companions, without the expected bottles of wine under their arms.

You would think, especially with our 21st century view of 'time is money' and seven secrets of success, that in view of what lay ahead, Jesus might have wanted to get down to the serious business of training his friends for future ministry right away:

- a time away in the desert,
- bible school to learn the intricacies of Torah and Prophets,
- prayer

Instead, they go to a wedding - the Aramaic for *wedding feast* has the same root as *drink*. A wedding is a time of revelry and rejoicing. Although wine was a symbol of joy, drunkenness throughout the scriptures was a great disgrace (Stoffregen).

Jesus show us that it's in **everyday** life that God does things **abundantly**.

*God **wants** to give us more and more life and joy.*

God is continually pouring out love and light to us, stretching our being so that we can receive always more, infinitely more (Vanier 2005:55)

We often fail to discern his love, seeing only the hands of those who give us the wine and not realising where it comes from and the grace it represents (Whitacre 199: 80)

Wine in the Near East was an image of sustenance and life - water was scarce and a bit dangerous to drink. When Isaac blessed Jacob he prayed that God *may give [him] of heaven's dew and of earth's richness – an abundance of grain and new wine* (Genesis 27:28)

Wine was the sign of God's promise of abundant blessing, to be looked forward to in the end times when there will be the kind of celebration and festivity that we can only begin to imagine.

Before he died, Jesus said *I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.* (Luke 22:18)

He too looks forward to that day of celebration with us!

Unexpected encounter

Encounter with God is can be unexpected and sometimes mysterious. Melchizedek came to Abraham with bread and wine, in other words a feast, after Abraham's victory in war – and a blessing from the mysterious Melchizedek.

Melchizedek symbolises Jesus as priest and king - the one who will bring salvation and peace.

God shows up for us in our normal everyday life, unexpectedly, surprising us with joy and delight,

in

- a sudden awareness of his presence,
- a tangible answer to prayer,
- a chain of events where everything suddenly falls into place,
- an unexpected compliment
- in the silence of people worshipping together.

Do you recognise the gift of God to you at that moment?

We get so caught up with our little life and its demands that we don't see abundance, love, goodness, beauty.

The mindfulness movement has much to teach us about opening our eyes, our hearts, our minds to seeing, hearing, receiving the loveliness that is life – God's own gift.

There is no place where God is not.

This week I went to Moorfields Hospital in London. Having been dealt with rather perfunctorily by the receptionist, it was such a pleasure to laugh with the nurse about my inability to read to bottom lines of the chart and a joy to have a real conversation with the doctor, instead of the more usual few sentences thrown out from behind a computer.

Moments of grace. Moments of life. As was the warning from a young Irish woman on the underground that one of my backpack zips was open.

God is also present in tough times.

A close friend of my son's is dying in a South African hospital. The pain for all of us who have been praying is immense. I don't know why it has to be this way for someone who has not yet reached midlife. When we last spoke with Adriaan he was sad that he wouldn't have long life, but he was at peace. Text messages from those who can visit him have consistently said the same. God is present. Mary, the disciples, all of us, experience grief, suffering, loss, but **that is not what we are created for**. All of us are created to share in the scene of wild rejoicing that Revelation describes.

So, when we drink wine *in remembrance*, it's the cup of pain **and** celebration.... and the anticipation of what is yet to be..... The Eucharist – thanksgiving.

This week expect the unexpected – be aware, mindful of God at work. Take it seriously, jot it down to remind yourself. And praise.

Conclusion

So, **why praise?**

Because

God is God

and

we are God's beloved daughter, beloved son

and we can know God in all things,

- in the heights of human happiness,
- the times when life just is

and

- in the downright awful, the stuff that seems to make no sense.

We cannot truly find our existence in any other way, and neither can the created world which longs to re-echo to the sound of human voices raised in songs of praise to their creator.

The passage from *Revelation* describes the culmination of all the thousands of words that have gone before in the Bible. It [describes] the shouting out in love, joy and praise.

Jesus was a guest at a wedding. He added a dimension of happiness that would otherwise have been missing. He still adds the dimension of deep down joy to our lives.

One day, when we are guests at his wedding feast, what overwhelming joy can we expect!

(Williams2005:24).

References

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