



# Massanutten

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

**The Purposeless-Driven Life**  
A Sermon Preached by John P. Leggett

April 11, 2010  
Easter 2 (Year C)

**Psalm 150**

## **Psalm 150**

*Praise the Lord!*

*Praise God in his sanctuary;  
praise him in his mighty firmament!  
Praise him for his mighty deeds;  
praise him according to his surpassing greatness!*

*Praise him with trumpet sound;  
praise him with lute and harp!  
Praise him with tambourine and dance;  
praise him with strings and pipe!  
Praise him with clanging cymbals;  
praise him with loud clashing cymbals!  
Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!  
Praise the Lord!*

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As a way into the sermon this morning, I want to begin by offering a spoken response to some things that I have seen or experienced in the last couple of weeks. At its heart, that's what praise is—it is a spoken reply to something that you have seen or experienced.

During Holy Week and Easter, I saw a lot of people doing a lot of amazing things, and I want to take just a moment to offer them praise. I saw people move every hymnal and Bible from each chair in this sanctuary and then move the chairs themselves to prepare for our service on Maundy Thursday.

I saw others hauling in tables. I experienced others baking bread or stirring pots of soup and setting the tables and sharing chalices and breaking bread and sharing the cup.

I then saw people wash dishes and move tables and chairs again as we prepared the space for Good Friday.

During that service, I heard the choir's beautiful anthem and the bells' stellar playing of *O Sacred Head Now Wounded*, and I was blown away by taking part in the chancel reading of the passion narrative once more.

And then, on the Saturday morning before Easter, I saw the folks gather again, and

the sanctuary and fellowship hall and outside entrance were literally astir with activity. I watched as Blake, one of children from the congregation, put every hymnal back in more than 500 seats, and then began on the Bibles. I watched as people arranged chairs, and set up for the breakfast, and prepared the cross for Easter morning.

In so many ways, so many of you worked to make our celebration of Holy Week and Easter so powerful. People were literally jumping in the offering plate in countless ways, offering their very selves to God.

And then came yesterday, the culmination of months of planning for Massanutten Cares. Again, there were so many people doing so many amazing things that everywhere I turned my heart burst in thanksgiving and praise. We even threw in the hosting of an unexpected funeral here yesterday afternoon, and folks jumped in to make that come off without a hitch, including giving the outdoor pavilion its first cleaning of the season.

And now, this morning, we have been fortunate to hear the children from our pre-school family lead us in singing, and we have all been blessed by their presence today, and by their ministry with and among us each day through the school year.

When you experience all that we have the last couple of weeks, all you can do is to respond to it with thanksgiving and praise.

When I saw that the preschool children would be singing “Jesus Loves Me,” I made a connection that I hope will make some sense to you. But, and I need to warn you, it will only make sense in time.

Like you, I grew up singing “Jesus Loves Me,” and I’ve been the typical, dutiful parent by teaching it to my children. But, I have to admit, I’ve corrupted it a bit too much lately. I’ll sing that tune to Rachel and Sarah whenever we’re driving somewhere, but, instead of singing, “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so,” I change the words. I’ll sing to them, “Jesus loves me more than you, that’s what Jesus is always gonna do.”

Boy, does that make them mad. But then I explain it to them. They think I’m saying that Jesus loves *me* more than Jesus loves *them*. Like the t-shirt one of my friends has been known to wear that reads, “Jesus loves you, but I’m his favorite.”

No, I tell them, what I mean by that song is this: No matter how much you think you love me (and it better be a lot!), Jesus loves me even more than that. Get it? “Jesus loves me more than you....”

I hope that makes some sense, because it’s that type of thinking that is the clue to understanding not only the title to today’s sermon, but its essence as well.

As many of you will know, Rick Warren has made a fortune with what I like to call his purpose-driven empire. What began as a single thing has morphed into a range of merchandise from water bottles to pens to Bibles to as many different variations on devotions as you can think of.

And while there is much in his writing to commend, including that life has a purpose, what cannot be commended so highly is what our consumer culture has done to the basic thought. What we’ve done—and again, I don’t think this is about Rick Warren as much as it is about us—what we’ve done is to turn the purpose of life into something about us, which goes precisely against everything the Bible has to say about our life in

relation to God.

The purpose of life, you see, is to lose ourselves in wonder, love, and praise of God. Out of that life of praise, any number of good things can and do happen, but we get things turned around if we make that the reason we offer praise rather than understanding praise as the end itself.

Into the sanctuary today comes the resounding Hallelujahs of Psalm 150. The psalm begins and ends with the invitation to praise the Lord, and in between those book-ends are no less than 10 calls to shout praise to God. This psalm is, as someone once said, “the church’s Easter alleluia turned into an entire psalm.”

In this psalm, every creature in heaven and on earth is invited to praise God, and every instrument is to be played. And what’s particularly interesting about this psalm of praise is what’s missing from it. In other psalms of praise, there is the invitation to praise God, followed by all the reasons that you should do so. In other words, “Praise the Lord. Why? Because he has led us through the waters of the sea.” “Praise the Lord. Why? Because he is making all things new.”

But this psalm has none of that—it is simply the determined, enthusiastic, uninterrupted, relentless, unrelieved call to praise that will not be satisfied until all creatures everywhere are ready and willing to participate in an unending song of praise.

This psalm invites us to simply spend our lives shouting alleluia to the Lord.

One of my favorite writers, Joan Chittister, describes how in the early years of growing up, she heard someone say that people who went to heaven would sit at the throne of God and sing “Alleluia” all day long. When she first heard that, she admits, it didn’t thrill her one bit. She even describes it as the moment that heaven lost some of its luster for her. (This account is contained in the new book written by Joan Chittister and Rowan Williams entitled *Uncommon Gratitude: Alleluia for All That Is*.)

But as she grew older, she wondered what it might mean to sing alleluia all day long, every day of your life. Those thoughts finally provoked a question in her: What if life itself is meant to be one long alleluia moment?

It is that understanding of life to which Psalm 150 invites us. And if we accept that invitation, all of life becomes an exercise in learning to sing alleluia. It will always be an exercise, of course, because every life is a mixture of joy and hardship, of struggle and triumph, and we must never think it an easy thing to sing alleluia in the midst of difficult times.

After all, alleluia is no substitute for reality. It is simply the awareness of another whole kind of reality—a reality beyond the immediate, beyond the delusional, beyond the instant perception of things. It’s the type of reality that enabled Paul to sing while locked away in prison. It’s the type of reality that sees something deeper, something which would inspire the faithful in Haiti to sing hymns of praise even while trapped in the rubble of their former homes.

To shout alleluia—to sing it with our words and with our lives—is simply to say “All hail to the One who is.” It is, as someone once wrote, the highest hymn of praise, the ultimate expression of thanksgiving, the pinnacle of triumph, the acme of human joy.” It is all of these things for one simple reason: God is Good, and we know it.

Those of you who were here last week know that I gave a bit of grief to the early service congregation for not responding immediately to the church's Easter refrain. So I want to try it again just for a moment. Consider this an opportunity for redemption.

The Lord is Risen! (He is risen indeed!)

Great! Now I want us to learn a new refrain, one that's popular with the church's young people today. And it goes like this: God is good (all the time). All the time (God is good.) (Repeat several times.)

We have just offered praise to God, and we have done so for no purpose. Actually, that's not quite true. We have done it for the sole purpose of yielding our lives to God.

Ultimately, that's what Psalm 150 wants us to do—to yield our whole lives and selves to the God to whom we belong. To say that God is good and that we know it.

Do you remember? God is good (all the time.)

All the time (God is good).

Hallelujah indeed!