

Wisdom in the Holy Happening

Based on Psalm 146

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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Psalm 146 sounds like a resume. If it came across your desk, would you hire God? Let's see: Keeps faith (check!); Executes justice (right on!); Gives food to the hungry (just what we need!); Sets the prisoners free (awesome!); Opens the eyes of the blind (wow!); Lifts up those who are bowed down (nice!); Loves the righteous (good!); Watches over strangers (fantastic!); Upholds the orphan and widow (excellent!); Brings to ruin the way of the wicked (impressive!); and, one worshipper came up to me after this Message was preached to remind me, "that God, the great Architect, created the universe in 7 days (with a day's rest! Check!)

Sounds like someone I'd want to bring on board. What about you? Show of hands! Do we want to bring God along? Yes! Hallelujah! Psalm 146 doesn't kick off the Hallelujah Psalms (the last five psalms in the Bible) for nothing. It is the beginning of the end; a resounding crescendo of what God can do. Each of the five psalms begins and ends with an exuberant "Praise ye the Lord," or, in the Hebrew, "Hallelujah!"

While "Hallelujah" shows up 22 times in the Hebrew scriptures, it appears just four times in the Greek, all of them when the great congregation of saints convenes in heaven. Revelation 19:5 tells us that the saints will show up in the company of angels to rejoice and give praise. It's an image of a divine party. A holy happening. We wouldn't want to miss it.

(The choir breaks into the refrain:)

Oh, when the saints go marchin' in,
Oh, when the saints go marchin' in,
Lord, I want to be in that number
When the saints go marchin' in.

In fact, from Psalm 146 through to Psalm 150, the party gets bigger and bigger. Psalm 146 is very individual. The psalmist calls himself to praise God. "Oh my soul" (Psalm 146:1) he says. In Psalm 147, all the people of Jerusalem are called to praise. Fast forward to the very last line of the entire book of the Psalms and everything shows up: "Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!" (Psalm 150:6).

I've been to some pretty blockbuster parties in my time and I bet you have, too. But can you imagine what it would be like if "everything that breathes" was invited to the party? You can imagine the invites: Are you breathing? Frosting the glass? Well, come on over.

This vision isn't just of a street party but an every street party. A party of the whole cosmos. Wow! Wouldn't that be something? A celebration to end all celebrations!

(The choir or soloist breaks into the refrain:)

And when the sun begins to shine,
And when the sun begins to shine,
Oh, how I want to be in that number
When the sun begins to shine.

We are surrounded by "saints" as we worship, and as we party, today. Today we celebrate the long, rich history of St. Andrew's – both the St. Andrew's tradition rooted deeply in Scottish heritage, and, we celebrate the past and present saints who have helped to lay the foundation of this wonderful St. Andrew's community of faith. Of course, it should also be mentioned that this is a cosmic celebration hosted by our Holy Creator Host, who brings people of all times together in praise.

Thank you for your investment of time, talent, and money. Thank you for responding to the invitation to be among the number of saints, past and present, who want to continue God's work outlined in Psalm 146: keeping faith, executing justice, feeding the hungry, freeing, opening, lifting, loving, watching, upholding. The world is blessed through the work of the church, through you.

Let's keep the party going. Let's celebrate and give praise to God our "all...life long" (Psalm 146:2), as the psalm says. Consider the psalm a standing invitation to join the holy, cosmic party every day of your life. Let's join the holy number!

(Everyone sings together:)

Oh, when the trumpet sounds its call,
Oh, when the trumpet sounds its call,
Oh Lord, I want to be in that number,
When the saints go marching in.

Oh, when the saints go marching in,
Oh, when the saints go marching in,
Oh Lord I want to be in that number,
When the saints go marching in.

Oh, when the saints go marchin' in,
Oh, when the saints go marchin' in,
Lord, I want to be in that number,
When the saints go marchin' in.