

Dr. Joe's Sermon

[Praise The Lord - Reasons for Praise](#) - Psalm 146

Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long. Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help. When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish. Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free; the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD!

The Psalmist declares will trust God always. But he hesitates and advises against trusting humanity, while God is trustworthy and therefore worthy of praise, humanity is clearly questionable.

Humans are mortal. Even good humans are mortal. When they die, all their promises die with them. They cannot do anything beyond their life. Their help is limited. God is always. Help is only able to come from someone while they are alive, and God is alive, yesterday, today and forever. Princes, people, friends or family are here today and gone in the twinkling of an eye.

In addition to humans who are good, each of us knows from personal experience that there are people who lack even common decency. They will lie or cheat or do whatever just for their own personal gain. Trusting them would be utter foolishness.

But God keeps faith. God created everything – birds, beasts, stars, sun and moon. God keeps faith. What God promises, God fulfills. This is the reason the Psalmist gives for praising God. God keeps faith therefore God is worthy of praise.

We must all find our own reasons to praise God. For the psalmist it was the faithfulness of God.

A quadriplegic I met in Atlanta named Sue was limited to talking, dialing the phone with a mouth stylus, and some painting she was just learning. She had become a quadriplegic because a drunk driver hit her and her four friends one New Years Eve on the way home from a church vesper's service. She described her and her friends as good high school kids who were becoming better Christians each year. She should have been going to college when we met, thinking about career or fiancée but instead she would never be out of the care of her parents unless she outlived them. She was not expected to because of the complications that came with her for of paralysis, but when she spoke about God her whole face light up. She was trusting God to walk and run again one day in heaven. She praised him that while the accident robbed her of most of her life here, the life she had always been looking forward to with God was still intact. She would still see and know God through eternity. While a drunk driver had taken away much of her life here, the life she truly wanted with God was just as fresh and real as always. She praised God for her continued life with God. She found a reason to praise God in God's faithfulness to her.

Back in the fifteenth century, in a tiny village near Nuremberg, lived a family with eighteen children. Eighteen! In order merely to keep food on the table for this mob, the father and head of the household, a goldsmith by profession, worked almost eighteen hours a day at his trade and any other paying chore he could find in the neighborhood.

Despite their seemingly hopeless condition, two of the children had a dream. They both wanted to pursue their talent for art, but they knew full well that their father would never be financially able to send either of them to Nuremberg to study at the Academy.

After many long discussions at night in their crowded bed, the two boys finally worked out a pact. They would toss a coin. The loser would go down into the nearby mines and, with his earnings, support his brother while he attended the academy. Then, when that brother who won the toss completed his studies, in four years, he would support the other brother at the academy, either with sales of his artwork or, if necessary, also by laboring in the mines.

They tossed a coin on a Sunday morning after church and the winner went off to Nuremberg.

Albert, the loser, went down into the dangerous mines and, for the next four years, financed his brother, whose work at the academy was almost an immediate sensation. The brother's etchings, his woodcuts, and his oils were far better than those of most of his professors, and by the time he graduated, he was beginning to earn considerable fees for his commissioned works.

When the young artist returned to his village, the family held a festive dinner on their lawn to celebrate his triumphant homecoming. After a long and memorable meal, punctuated with music and laughter, he rose from his honored position at the head of the table to drink a toast to his beloved brother for the years of sacrifice that had enabled him to fulfill his ambition. His closing words were, "And now, Albert, blessed brother of mine, now it is your turn. Now you can go to Nuremberg to pursue your dream, and I will take care of you."

All heads turned in eager expectation to the far end of the table where Albert sat, tears streaming down his pale face, shaking his lowered head from side to side while he sobbed and repeated, over and over, "No ...no ...no ...no."

Finally, Albert rose and wiped the tears from his cheeks. He glanced down the long table at the faces he loved, and then, holding his hands close to his right cheek, he said softly, "No, brother. I cannot go to Nuremberg. It is too late for me. Look ... look what four years in the mines have done to my hands! The bones in every finger have been smashed at least once, and lately I have been suffering from arthritis so badly in my right hand that I cannot even hold a glass to return your toast, much less make delicate lines on parchment or canvas with a pen or a brush. No, brother ... for me it is too late."

More than 450 years have passed. By now, hundreds of masterful portraits, pen and silver-point sketches, watercolors, charcoals, woodcuts, and copper engravings hang in every great museum in the world, but the odds are great that you, like most people, are familiar with only one of Albrecht Durer's works. More than merely being familiar with it, you very well may have a reproduction hanging in your home or office.

One day, to pay homage to Albert for all that he had sacrificed, Albrecht Durer painstakingly drew his brother's abused hands with palms together and thin fingers stretched skyward. He called his powerful drawing simply "Hands," but the entire world almost immediately opened their hearts to his great masterpiece and renamed his tribute of love "The Praying Hands."

You see Albrecht had an abiding faith in God. When he paid tribute to his brother while he could have drawn a portrait of the man who had made his life possible what struck him most were his brother's hands. And if the truth be told not just his hands but the loving care and sacrifice those hands had made in providing for him. In the hands of his brother, Albrecht saw the hands of Christ who loved and cared for them both. It was by the grace of God and the Christ like commitment to provide for his brother that Albert had worked in the mines. The brothers found a reason to praise God because of the Christ like nature of love that they shared one for another.

What are you praising God for? What in your life is still alive, because God has not let the dream die or fade away? What has kept you alive through troubled times of years of suffering? Has it pointed you to a reason to recognize God at work in your life? Have you discovered a reason to praise God for yourself?

It is my task to remind you to praise God. You may even find inspiration in the stories you have heard this morning. But if you are going to really allow the praise of God to be a cornerstone in your life, you will need to find your own reason for praising God.

The psalmist praises God for God's faithfulness. Albrecht and Albert for the love of Christ they found in their brother, and Sue for the assurance her life was still hid with Christ in spite of what had happened to her body. Do you have a reason for praising God? Has God touched your life in such a way you cannot cease praising God?