

**“Praise: A Way of Life?”** Saturday Night Worship Service August 17, 2019

Psalm 22:3-5

ST. LUKE 1:46-49

@UMCGeneva

Mary Gay McKinney (fillin' in)

It was our second year of college when our friend Margaret was on a first date with Allen. Margaret may have agreed to this blind date, as we called them then, because Allen was reported to be a religious man AND he had invited her to go with him to see GODSPELL. Margaret was among the last of us back to the dorm that night. She returned visibly shaken. On their way home from GODSPELL they had been t-boned by a hit and run driver. The car was badly damaged. The police came. Margaret's report went like this: After the crash and the jolt, Allen looked at her and said "Praise the Lord! Are you ok, Margaret." Now Margaret was and continues to be a faithful Christian, but it wasn't in her theology, or mine at the time, to say PTL when you've been in a car accident. How could he say that? Why did he say that? Pondering those questions then and now continues to change my life.

One of the translations of Psalm 22.3 goes like this ~ God inhabits the praises of his people. God is everywhere some may say, and yes that's true. Inhabiting has greater force, a more specific presence. God is enthroned ~ when this psalm was inspired, people knew that when a king sat on the throne, things were going to happen. Moving into that presence, the presence of a very present God, and with expectation, means things will happen.

Praise is a word used so widely and with such variance that it is both understood and misunderstood in more than one way. Praise can mean brown nosing, or buttering someone up, and it's done to make a good impression, or to get what we want. If that's our understanding then God can seem as one with a big ego that's like a fire that constantly needs to be stoked.

Praise could be what we do for a child's good behavior, or accomplishment, such as having the clarinet solo for the 5<sup>th</sup> grade band. That doesn't much fit either.

When it comes to God, perhaps praise acknowledges what is, and that whatever it is, God is in it. God inhabits, God is on the throne. As we explore a portion of Mary's song as recorded in the first chapter of St. Luke's gospel, we can imagine that Jesus' mother somehow knew she could trust God when she was in danger of losing Joseph, being stoned, losing her life. Were it not for her fierce willingness to trust God and to carry this unusual pregnancy, where would any of us be?

When Merlin Carothers returned from WWII his life had been changed. He began testing the power of praise. He praised God, all the while building his spiritual muscles of forgiveness and gratitude. His books include Prison to Praise, Power in Praise, Answers to Praise. Bringing Heaven into Hell was the title that intrigued, startled me most, so that's the one I have. He likens praise to thanksgiving. They are closely related if we are to understand St. Paul's letter to Thessalonians (5:17) ~ Merlin shares story after story of the way things change when we thank God, no matter what.

Sharing this message has at times ended up with a test for me. Do I really mean this and am willing to employ it in my own life. You may remember the summer of 2008 as one when flights both domestic and international were delayed for hours before takeoff. I received word on a Saturday morning that my beloved Aunt Carolyn had died. The funeral would be Monday morning in Dublin, Georgia. I quickly secured a flight out of O'Hare on Sunday. We were late boarding the plane and once we were on the tarmac, the plane stopped. Not only did it stop, but after a while the air conditioning was turned off. I sat there fuming. I was upset that I might miss Aunt Carolyn's service. After an hour or so something prompted me to think back to the sermon I preached that morning, about thanking and praising God in all things. Hmmmm . . . I started thanking God, praising God for the plane NOT taking off, thanking God that this could mean I might miss the funeral. In about fifteen minutes I heard the engines begin to roar. Once I arrived at the rental car agency at midnight I had another long wait in which I could only pray again, "Thank you, Lord, that there isn't a car here for me at the moment and there is only one person at the counter." By 1:30am I was on my way. After a very brief night's rest in Macon I made it to Dublin with fifteen minutes to spare. Thanks be to God! Radical prayer, radical praise, radical belief that God inhabits this situation whether I can see it or not, could this really be a way of life? It was for Allen that night when they were t-boned. It's not too late to start. If praise and its partners, forgiveness and thanksgiving, become more and more my way of my life and yours, Jesus is going to have a whole lot more terrain to work with. God inhabits more and more of the terrain where we may have been fooled into thinking God is absent. Let's pray for one another that when we are tested and tried our friends and relations will see Praise as our way of life, and perhaps, theirs, too. Praise ye the Lord, Hallelujah!