

## *Revealed in all of creation.*

*Psalm 148; John 13: 31-35*

What did Jesus reveal in his resurrection? That is what we are exploring over this season of Easter. Jesus revealed that we cannot go where he is going, but what we can do is live out his mission in the world here and now by choosing to be Christ's disciples in the world. We see Christ in one another and in all of creation and we are called to care for all that Christ cared for. I want to begin by reading the first portion of 'A Song of Faith' our most recent United Church faith statement. *It is a very poetic piece, but I think it captures a lot of praise in it.*

*"God is Holy mystery, beyond complete knowledge, above perfect description. Yet in love the one eternal God seeks relationship. So, God creates the universe and with it the possibility of being and relating. God tends the universe, mending the broken and reconciling the estranged. God enlivens the universe guiding all things toward harmony with their source. Grateful for God's loving action we cannot keep from singing. With the church through the ages we speak of God as one and triune; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We also speak of God as Creator, redeemer, sustainer; as God, Christ, Spirit, mother, friend, comforter, source of life, Living Word and bond of love and in other ways that speak faithfully of the one on whom our hearts rely, the fully shared life at the heart of the universe. We witnessed a Holy mystery that is wholly love. God is Creative, self-giving, generously moving in all the near and distant corners of the universe. Nothing exists that does not find its source in God. Our first response to God's providence is gratitude; we sing with thanksgiving. Finding ourselves in a world of beauty and mystery; of living things, diverse and interdependent; of complex patterns of growth and evolution, of sub-atomic particles and cosmic swirls. We sing of God the Creator, the maker and source of all that is. Each part of creation reveals unique aspects of God the Creator who is both in creation and beyond it. All parts of creation, both animate and inanimate are related. All creation is good. We sing of the Creator who made humans to live and move and have their being in God. In and with God we can direct our lives to right relationship with each other and with God. We can discover our place as one strand in the web of life and we grow in wisdom and compassion we can recognize all people as kin. And we accept our mortality, finitude, not as a curse, but as a challenge to make our lives and choices matter."*

Today our scripture readings call us to praise and to love. Praise is a central practice in living as faithful people. Worship is a form of praise. We praise God through our prayers, through our words, our singing, our actions, our offerings and in our sharing of stories. To begin with praise

requires us to notice; we need to be mindful, both of what has occurred in the past and what is going on in the present and then acknowledge how God has created and is creating, how God has been active and is active. We need to begin by noticing. When we do, we can ask ourselves the following question. What is it that God is doing here in this place and in this moment? The Psalm directs our attention primarily to God's creative activity but calls us to praise all that we can see when we look carefully around us. So, I ask myself this question: What is it that God has been up to in our midst? What is it that I've noticed and been aware of?

I noticed how inspired guests were at a wedding here in the sanctuary as they walked in and saw the beauty and the colour in the stained-glass windows, the richness of the wood, the feel of this sacred space and they were in awe. I saw God in our midst hearing music gently playing on a piano overtop of people who had come to receive much needed food. The sounds of a truck, the boxes and bags being packed and unpacked, and the sounds of welcome to the people we had not seen since last month. I saw God at work when I saw peace come over a person who was experiencing the comfort of a dog snuggling up to them. Someone who was often isolated, who longs to be touched and experience love. I saw God at work with people riding by on their bikes calling out to our gardeners, saying hello and expressing their appreciation for the beauty of nature in our concrete jungle. I saw God at work in the sharing of concern for a friend, who was not well and who was not able to be with us today and the gratitude from the friend who wasn't able to be here because they had been cared for through so many small gestures, through the delivery of food, and the phone calls just asking how they were. These are just a few of the moments this week where I was aware of God and God's spirit at work. Where did you notice God's spirit this week? What were the moments in your life where God was at work?

We all like to believe that we are always grateful, but sometimes we resist gratitude. We resist praising God and others because we do not want to acknowledge our dependence on God or interdependence with the rest of creation and humanity. Catherine L. Kelsey writes, 'Psychologically and spiritually we resist knowing our vulnerabilities. It is easier for us not to notice what God is doing than to trust that God's activity in the interconnected web of life will sustain us.'<sup>1</sup> I have come to believe in this world that independence can at times be a type of addiction. Independence makes us feel strong. It can help us mask what is really going on as we present ourselves and being very capable and fine on our own, but it can also isolate us and alienate us from others. We often don't realize that our independence can be unhealthy at times. Until we find ourselves in a situation where we can't do it ourselves; where suddenly we require the help of someone else. How often are we surprised after that event, when we tell our friends and family of our predicament and how we struggled and managed through, that they get mad at us because we didn't call them and ask for their help?

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine L. Kelsey, *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 2, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p. 458.

God calls us to be in relationship with one another. We want to help one another. Our independence can sometimes be a barrier to that happening. So, praise is something we need to do by noticing and being aware. Praise is something that is empty if there is no gratitude. Praise also does not always have to be positive. Sometimes when we think of praise, we think we think we must come and cheer and raise our arms and exclaim that this is wonderful. Praise can be found in the negative as well. It is often easy to praise when we feel good; it's harder to express praise in negative times. When we call out in thanks for the love and care that we were shown; when in times of grief and loss we can still praise and thank God in acts of remembrance, when we remember how the people that we are missing made an impact in our life. We also can praise through affirmation by encouraging others to cultivate their unique gifts. We can praise through challenging others to use their gifts in ways that they may not have thought of before. Have you ever written a note of affirmation to someone acknowledging something that they've done for you in your life that they may not have been aware of? Have you seen how that brings joy, appreciation to them? That is an act of praise; it is an act of remembering that we are interconnected; that we are not alone in this world.

The act of praising helps us. It reveals to us a new focus. A focus that includes all, and helps us look beyond ourselves and our tiny little world that we often live in. All of creation and all of humanity need to be praised. Jesus then gives us a new commandment that says we are to love one another. This commandment is not about what you believe. The commandment is about how you act. Praise is not about what you believe. Praise is about how God is active in all of creation. We are being called today to live a life of faith that is a process, not a belief system. Living a life of faith helps people to act in ways that are supposed to change us. When we truly are faithful followers and go out into the world and live the mission which is to love others and to give God thanks and praise not only is the world transformed, but we are transformed. When we go out and give praise and affirmation for all that we receive and all that we see we can't focus on the misery that is our world sometimes; the negativity that is surrounding us all thinking that this whole world is falling apart and there is nothing good left in it. We need to trust in God. We need to trust in each other, and we need to spend time praising. I am so thankful that you have all come here today to praise but remember that it looks different for everyone. Praise comes in many forms all God asks is that we do it and that we love and that we act in love.

'A Song of Faith' ends this way,

*"We place our hope in God and we sing of a life beyond life and a future good beyond imagining. A new heaven and a new earth, the end of sorrow pain and tears, where Christ's return and life with God, the making new of all things."*

We yearn for the coming of that future even while participating in eternal life now. Grateful for God's loving actions we cannot keep from singing. Creating and seeking relationship in awe and trust we witnessed to the Holy mystery who is wholly love. For this we give God thanks. Amen.