

Never-Ending Hope
Rev. Michael R. Blackwood
United Church of Broomfield
November 7, 2021

Psalm 146 (CEB)

- ¹ Praise the Lord!
Let my whole being praise the Lord!
- ² I will praise the Lord with all my life;
I will sing praises to my God as long as I live.
- ³ Don't trust leaders;
don't trust any human beings—
there's no saving help with them!
- ⁴ Their breath leaves them,
then they go back to the ground.
On that very same day, their plans die too.
- ⁵ The person whose help is the God of Jacob—
the person whose hope rests on the Lord their God—
is truly happy!
- ⁶ God: the maker of heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them,
God: who is faithful forever,
- ⁷ who gives justice to people who are oppressed,
who gives bread to people who are starving!
The Lord: who frees prisoners.
- ⁸ The Lord: who makes the blind see.
The Lord: who straightens up those who are bent low.
The Lord: who loves the righteous.
- ⁹ The Lord: who protects immigrants,
who helps orphans and widows,
but who makes the way of the wicked twist and turn!
- ¹⁰ The Lord will rule forever!
Zion, your God will rule from one generation to the next!
Praise the Lord!

'Twas mercy brought me from my *Pagan* land,
Taught my benighted soul to understand
That there's a God, that there's a savior too:
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
Some view our stable race with scornful eye,
"Their color is a diabolic die."
Remember, *Christians, Negroes*, black as *Cain*,
May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.

On Being Brought from Africa to America by Phillis Wheatley

*An African slave brought to North America in 1761 from Senegal/Gambia. She was “fortunate” enough to be educated alongside the children of her masters. Her literary talents shone quickly. In 1773, her book **Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral** was published. “...it marked several significant accomplishments. It was the first book by a slave to be published in the Colonies, and only the third book by a woman in the American colonies to be published.”¹ (It may be interested to note that the book was published in London, because publishers in Boston refused to consider it).*

This last week, we finished our reading and study of ***The Cross and the Lynching Tree***. There were several in our group who commented that the book was a wonderful read and also, terrible. Reading, recalling, and reflecting on some of the ugliest moments in American history is painful for one’s soul and psyche, but, as we’ve learned, it can also be hopeful and liberating.

“[Such] personal suffering challenges faith, but social suffering, which comes from human hate, challenges it even more. P153

....God’s liberation of the poor is the primary theme of Jesus’ gospel. P154

“[It] is God's message of liberation in an unredeemed and tortured world. As such, it is a transcendent reality that lifts our spirits to a world far removed from the suffering of this one.” P155

“The cross is the most empowering symbol of God's loving solidarity with the least of these, the unwanted in society who suffer daily from great injustices. Christians must face the cross as the terrible tragedy it was and discover in it, through faith and repentance, the liberating joy of eternal salvation.” P 156

“...the lynching tree reveals the true religious meaning of the cross for American Christians today. The cross needs the lynching tree to remind Americans of the reality of suffering - to keep the cross from becoming a symbol of abstract sentimental piety.... the lynching tree also needs the cross, without which it becomes simply an abomination. It is the cross that points in the direction of hope, the confidence that there is a dimension to life beyond the reach of the oppressor.” P161-2

Today’s reading from the Psalms is that beautiful reminder of HOPE – there is LIFE beyond the reach of the oppressor; for God loves the oppressed. Psalm 146 also gives us strength, courage and that direction provided by the cross.

“We [must not] resign ourselves to the injustice of the world while passively and quietly waiting for the coming of God’s Reign. We must not tolerate human injustice while keeping our heads down and waiting for God’s justice.

[In Psalm 146,] We read that God upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free and gives sight to the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down. The Lord watches over the foreigner, the refugee, the fatherless and the widow. [The lord helps, hopes, creates, is just, is giving

¹ <https://www.literaryladiesguide.com/classic-women-authors-poetry/10-poems-by-phillis-wheatley-from-poems-on-various-subjects-religious-and-moral-1773/>

and is faithful to the marginalized, the outcasts and the oppressed.] All of this happens in the present tense! God is doing this work now.

Spend some more time in the psalms and we find the words *justice* and *righteousness* together again and again. It's not quite this simple, but you could say that justice is the righting of wrongs. **Righteousness is a way of being in which rights are honored, and every person can access what he or she or they has a right to access.** Both [justice and righteousness] are described as things that God loves. God has plenty of love for everyone, but again and again, [God] singles out the beaten down and neglected, the poor, the ones who never get a break — the people who do not receive justice and do not live in that right way of being. God loves justice and righteousness and people who are shut out from justice and righteousness. God loves them and as such, God suffers when they suffer.

As lovers of God [and followers of Jesus], we are involved. If we love God, then it makes sense that we love those whom [She] loves. If we love God and if God suffers with the oppressed, then we work to ease the suffering of the one we love; we relieve the oppressed. True, God does not *need* us to help Him out of any troubles. It's not *need* that drives us. It is love that drives us. We love not with words, but with action."²

I want to end today's message with another poem. This one is called The Undefeated by poet Kwame Alexander: ***Light for the World to See: A Thousand Words on Race and Hope.***

*This is for the unforgettable, the swift and sweet ones who hurdled history and opened a world of possible
The ones who survived America by any means necessary and the ones who didn't*

*This is for the undeniable the ones who scored with chains on one hand and hope in the other
This is for the unflappable the sophisticated ones who box adversity who tackle vision who shine their light for
the world to see and don't stop till the break of dawn
This is for the unafraid - the righteous marching ones who carried the red white and weary Blues who sang we
shall not be moved because black lives matter
This is for the unspeakable and this is for the unstoppable
This is for the unspeakable and this is for the unstoppable
This is for the doers and the dreamers the dreamers and the doers who swim the big sea of our imagination
and show us and show us the majestic shores of the promised land*

*the Jesse Owens, the Althea Gibsons, the Wilma Rudolphs, the Mohammed Alis, the Jordans and the swoops,
the Serenas and the LeBrons, the Reese Whitleys and the undiscovered
this is for the unbelievable - the "we real cool" ones
this is for the unbending - the "black as the night is beautiful" ones
this is for the underdogs and the uncertain – the unspoken but no longer untitled
this is for the undefeated
this is for the undefeated
this is for you and you and you
this is for us*

² Korver, Curtis. "Waiting Like Expectant Parents." 2018 Feb 14. <https://network.crcna.org/biblical-justice/waiting-expectant-parents-justice-and-hope-sunday-sermon-0>

AMEN