

Psalm 95:1-7 – Praise. Second reading 1 Peter 2

Our text for the year is Psalm 95:1, which in the NRSV translation says: ‘O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!’ We will focus on praising and worshipping God, all this year and especially today.

Today we also begin a sermon series on the church. This first sermon makes the point that the church exists to praise God. We, the church, are called to glorify and worship God. This is a theme in the whole Bible.

1. Old Testament examples

- Why did God create humans? Humans and all of creation exist to glorify God. He even made animals to praise Him. In the psalms even the mountains ‘shout out’ and the rivers ‘clap their hands’ to praise their creator.
- The nation of Israel was created to glorify God. Their ancestor Judah (from whom the name ‘Jews’ comes) got the name ‘one who praises the LORD’ (Genesis 29:35), for his mother Lea said: ‘I will praise the LORD’.
- David had many faults, but he is famous as the poet who made many psalms in praise of God. Praising God is very important!
- In preparation for the building of the temple, David already appointed Levites for the sole purpose of praising God, see 1 Chronicles 25. A special group of people was employed for the sole purpose of praising God. We may think the lists of names in this chapter boring, but for the Israelites they were relevant: ‘Look, my ancestor was one of those who worshipped God in the temple!’
- In Psalm 95:1 ‘come’ means that the people should gather; it is better to worship God together than alone, if possible.
- God is praised not only for what He does for us, but also for who He is.

2. New Testament examples

- As we saw recently in Advent, already around the time when Jesus is born, Zechariah, Mary and Simeon sing the praises of God. And the angels who announce the birth of Jesus sing ‘Glory to God in the highest’. We are asked to join in.
- In Acts 16, when he has been treated badly and is in prison, Paul sings the praises of God even at night. In his letters he calls on the churches to praise God with old and new songs.
- In Philippians 1 we find a kind of prayer for a new year, which ends with the wish that all will be to the glory of God: ‘And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.’
- 1 Peter 2:9 states as the purpose of the church: ‘you are a chosen people ... that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.’
- When we worked our way through Revelation, we saw how many hymns this book contains. Whenever an act of God is completed, a song of praise in heaven follows. Chapter 4 even repeats what is stated in Isaiah 6, that in heaven the worship of God goes on 24/7: ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God almighty.’

3. What does this mean for us in 2022?

- Humanism redefined the purpose of human life as ‘the pursuit of happiness through the cultivation of pleasure’. Consumerism says that the purpose of life is acquiring and consuming goods. As Christians we know better: we exist to praise the Lord!
- The good thing about the call to praise Him is: it suits us all, because old and young can do this. You are never too old or too young to praise Him!
- This should not depend on how we feel or how we are; we can praise God at any moment in our lives. Whether we feel like it or not. There will be days of adversity – ‘and yet’ we can sing to God’s glory.

- If you think that this is a waste of time and energy, then reflect on who God is. Surely, He is worth all we can give Him! So if you are still looking for a new year's resolution, then consider praising God for his glory [himself] and goodness [to us].