

Praise the Lord from the Heavens...and Everywhere Else

The Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year C, RCL. Psalm 148, John 13:31-35. April 23, 2016.
The Episcopal Shared Ministry of Our Saviour, Salem and Trinity, Alliance. The Rev'd
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Psalm 148 is a circle: it moves from the heavens to the depths of the sea (in the middle of the psalm at verse seven) then up through water, wind, fire and earth, on up through plants and animals and human beings, and back to God, who is over earth and heaven.

An important thing to notice here is that there is nothing above God. No one, nothing, nowhere. God does not come from, derive from, depend on anything or anyplace. Everything else depends on him. This is a very sophisticated notion of the divine, much more so than, for example, the Greek or Roman gods, who are shown as existing in a cosmos that they did not create. Most notions of reality are at best like an infinite regress, like two mirrors that show an infinite series of images reflected back and forth. But serious monotheism stops with God.

If we are going to get annoyed with the condition of the world as we experience it, we had better deal with God, and nothing or no one less. Because he closes the circle of being. It starts and stops with him. Though he did not cause evil, he is the one who can and does take responsibility for it. That is what the redemption of the world through Jesus Christ is all about. God hears the world's complaints, the

world's anguish, the world's sorrow, and Jesus is the answer.

But if we would be guided by Psalm 148's great circle of praise, we would do best to praise God at least as much as we groan to him in pain. Or rather, we would do best to let our relationship to God begin and end in praise. Because, believe me—and if you don't believe me, read the rest of the psalms—the ancient witnesses that say God is worthy of ultimate, endless and resounding praise were not immune to the negative side of life. They could, and often did, yell at God for justice and for relief from suffering.

But holiness is based on the way everything begins and ends in the glory of God. That's why life in God begins and ends in praise. We can pray about anything, but the more we get to know God the more praise and its close cousin, gratefulness, will fill our hearts and minds. The more it does, the more we will know and act according to the one commandment given by our Lord: to love one another (John 13:34), to love in such a way and to such a degree that it fills our hearts and minds and overflows into all creation—God's creation, which, because it begins and ends in him, cannot help praising him.