

Psalm 146 Worship and Health
December 11, 2020

Among the great religious discoveries in history involves the human need to acknowledge that which is greater than itself. The farthest reach of that consideration is to acknowledge God as God, divine, eternal, transcendent. The word for this acknowledgment is “worship.”

The discovery does not end there. To recognize the majesty of that which is transcendent has the affect of putting us in our place, not in the sense of humiliation, but setting right, giving us the right perspective about the meaning of our lives.

Thus, given the right perspective, our self-esteem is sustainable because it is based in reality, and our actions can be centered in a healthy way. It leads both to the right understanding of ourselves as well as right action. In other words, worship becomes an essential part of a healthy life, and not merely one way among many to seek wholeness and peace.

Now the danger is not that we might worship god as something else, but that we might become devoted to something else as if it were God. The word for this consideration is idolatry. Human beings are excellent at giving outsized importance to aspects of their lives that do not deserve it; the pursuit of pleasure, an outsized devotion to a lesser concern, which *can* turn into the willingness to disregard the well-being of another, which flies in the face of the

biblical exhortation to, “love your neighbor as yourself.”

There is a comical television commercial, as a matter of fact, it is a Dr. Pepper Commercial. I never did like Dr. Pepper (it is okay with me if you like it, I just never did). I went to a college down the street from where it was invented, and even if one specifically asked for a Coke or a Pepsi, one would often be given Dr. Pepper. I admit that they have had some pretty good commercials down through the years.

In their Fanville Campaign, they depict a fictional town where everyone is fanatic about, “State,” (I am sure there is not meant to be a reference to any college or university with a football team around here). In one commercial they have an intervention with a young man who is *not* sufficiently obsessed with the team, not devastated enough with a recent loss, not visible enough on social media making irrational rants. The parents and neighbors confront the young man about “getting his priorities straight.”

He tells them that he is at peace with it all, there are other things in life and that football is not the most important. At that point they go to pieces, “he has lost it completely.” I am not at all sure what it has to do with Dr. Pepper, except to make us think about it, which doesn’t work with me because I don’t like the way it tastes and won’t consume a product merely because the commercials are funny.

It is all in fun, of course, but part of what makes it work as advertising is that it refers to a truth we all know is true; that our lives are caricatured when our values and priorities are out of place. Excessive fandom is one way we misplace values. People can be too attached to a country, a church, a family, a vocation. Almost always sermons about idolatry serve as a *stick* to prod us along in the other direction.

What is the carrot here? What is the upside, the benefit of the acknowledgment of God as God in all we do? By way of an answer, we find in scripture examples of the use of poetry and song to worship, and certainly the last of the songs in the psalter, including the 146th, are praise hymns.

“Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul. I will praise the Lord all my life. I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.”

Interestingly there is only one caveat mentioned. That is, of all the things in life that people can become attached to that result in distortions and contradictions; like money and sex, power, only one is mentioned . . . other human beings. We are told not to trust them with the faith meant for God.

“Do not put your trust in human beings who cannot save; who when their spirit departs, return to the ground.”

That may include princes and presidents, footballers and rock stars, teachers, ministers, family, friends. Rather;

“Blessed is the one whose help is in the God of Jacob, whose hope is the Lord, their God.” And then there are a set of attributes and actions; God is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them, the Lord remains faithful forever;

God upholds the cause of the oppressed
gives food to the hungry,
sets the prisoners free,
gives sight to the blind,
lifts up those who are bowed down,
loves the righteous, watches over the aliens;
sustains the fatherless and the widow,
Frustrates the wicked, reigns forever.

For many, these descriptions are at best imperfectly realized. There are times when we do not experience them as being true.

What is envisioned by the psalmist, and more so, by the prophets, and all those whose understanding of life became a part of the biblical message, is a world of healthy people living in healthy communities.

This healthiness, righteousness, is always hard to achieve and never has been perfectly; although some efforts have been better than others. Being healthy is easier said than done . . . it requires a set of relationships in which people can interact with

honestly, equitability, dignity, integrity, and it also requires individuals willing to pursue goodness and health.

The message of the psalm is that it involves worship as well. The message of advent, of Christ's birth itself, is that this life together is God's will for all of us, that its failures are ours, and that God's live-giving power and mercy, along with the promise of eternal life stand as the foundation of a healthy world, and healthy individual lives, because God is not only majestic and transcendent, but also immanent, that is, here with us. The religious word for this consideration is Incarnation, and it is celebrated with great joy at the birth of Jesus.

Blessed, indeed, is the person whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is the Lord, our God.

Prayer

O God, maker of heaven and earth, of the sea and everything in it; you call us from the exile of self-centeredness to the right understanding of ourselves in relation to you.

Make us strong to join you in your holy work, which begins in us when we worship you as you are, leaving behind our excessive and misplaced attachments to the good things you have made. We make our prayer through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[Back](#)

[Home](#)