

Try It; You'll Like It
Seattle First Baptist Church
Dr. Patricia L. Hunter
August 19, 2018

Psalm 34:1-8 (Inclusive Bible)

I will praise YHWH always;
praise will continually be on my lips!
My soul will boast about YHWH –
let the oppressed hear it and be glad!
Glorify YHWH with me,
and let us exalt God's Name together!
I sought YHWH, who answered me
and freed me from all my fears.
Those who look to YHWH are radiant,
and their faces are never covered with shame.
The poor called out: YHWH heard
and saved them from all their troubles.
The angel of YHWH encamps around those
who revere God, and rescues them.
Taste and see how good YHWH is!
Happiness comes to those who take refuge in YHWH

What a glorious day to worship an awesome God. And, what a great day for a church picnic. It has been a trying week with the passing of the Queen, Aretha Franklin so to be in your presence this morning is truly a blessing. For African American religious leaders, this has been an exceedingly difficult season. In April we mourned the death of Dr. James Cone, the founder of Black liberation Theology and then ten days ago, Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon, the founding Mother of Black Womanist Theology passed. And now the death of Aretha Franklin who reminded us in song that hope, and love will always make a way.

Aretha Franklin's music meant the world to so many of us, and not just African Americans. She transcended musical genres of gospel, jazz, blues, and classical. She

touched people all over the world with her musical genius. Most likely, many of you were also moved by her music.

Aretha struggled with many issues, most visibly weight, but at times with her finances, depression and some phobias. But through it all we could tell her faith sustained her. She grew up in the Baptist church in Detroit and no matter how famous she got, there was no doubt her faith influenced her music. Many called her the greatest singer of all times. She had a powerful voice that could move us to tears one minute and get us out of our seats dancing the next. She will be missed but her music will continue forever. Psalm 34 is about offering praise in all seasons of our lives. I will bless the Lord at all times--in sickness and in health; in good times and bad; in joy and in sorrow. God's praise shall continually be in my mouth! Glorify YWHY with me and let us exalt God's name together.

Psalm 34 is a favorite psalm of many. This psalm is uplifting, yet in many ways it is counter intuitive or even nonsensical. I will bless the Lord at all times, means not just when things are good. Certainly, when all is well with us and our loved ones it is easy to praise God. But, I will bless the Lord at all times means I will bless the Lord and praise God even when life is really messed up. I will bless the Lord in my youth and in my aging years. I will bless the Lord when all the bills are paid and when there are more days of the month left than money to make ends meet. I will bless the Lord when the kids are cute, cuddly, and kind. And, I will bless the Lord when their hormones are raging, and nothing they do makes any sense. I will bless the Lord at all times means, I will praise God when those I vote for are in office and I will bless the Lord when my adversaries win. No matter what comes my way, the Psalmist says....I will bless the Lord. I will praise YHWH.

Well needless to say, it takes a mature faith to be in a place of praise and adoration at all times. Last Sunday, Dr. Tim preached about being in the depths and how we can't

go back to a more serene time as if the pain and sorrow we experienced never existed. We can't go back but we can go **through** and trust God to walk with us through the storm until we get to the other side. And while we are going through, we can praise God that things aren't any worse than they are—for things almost always could be worse.

Gospel singer Tramaine Hawkins, sings a gospel song entitled, I Never Lost My Praise. Tramaine tells the story of going through a really rough season and perhaps looking at the end of her singing career because of a cancerous tumor. No matter the outcome, she said, she was not going to allow that dreadful possibility to rob her of her praise and trust in God. That, my sisters and brothers, is praising God through the storm and through the rain. After surgery, the tumor was determined not to be cancerous and she continued to sing an even greater praise to God.

So how do we get to a place of praise. Well, one way is to trust scripture that says nothing, absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of God. Paul wrote in Romans 8 that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. I will bless the Lord at all times, because I know God will never desert me, even when I feel all alone. Even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death as the writer proclaimed in Psalm 23, You O God are with us. So, knowing that God will always be with you, and you, and you, and with me, I **will** give thanks and bless the Lord at all times.

Now, praising God, does not call for loud singing, speaking in unknown languages, or playing a tambourine. A simple **thank you God**, is praise. A quiet praise is still praise. Amen.

Hebrew Bible Scholar, J. Clinton McCann, Jr. writes that Psalm 34 is a psalm of praise and that praise involves the giving of one's whole self to God. It is an act of our personal will. I saw the best expression of giving ourselves to God about two years ago

on Pledge Sunday during the Children's sermon. One of our 2-year old's had come forward for the time with children and a giant offering plate had been constructed to illustrate Pledge Sunday and to explain why members would be coming forward later in the service bringing their financial commitments for the coming year.

During the children's message this precious child stepped into the giant offering plate on the floor and just stood there. In that moment, she captured what God wants from all of us—ourselves, our hearts, and our praise. In my 30+ years of ministry I have tried to explain, encourage, and cajole what this two-year-old did, by second nature in about 5 seconds. I will bless the Lord at all times with my heart and my whole being. No matter what comes my way, I'm standing in the offering plate.

The Psalmist writes in verse 2, my soul boasts in the Lord. In Hebrew the words **boast**, and **praise** come from the same root word. This is not a boast of arrogance as if to say look what I have, and you don't. This boast is about God, not what we have done or our accomplishments. It is all about God.

I come from a tradition where believers are encouraged to share their testimonies. I know in progressive circles **testimony** is a red flag word. So instead of testimony, we can talk about our stories or our faith journeys. A testimony/ or faith journey is an accounting of how God brought us through. It is a boast about how God, healed our wounded spirits and made a way out of no way. My soul boasts in what God has done and what God will do in the future.

Then the psalmist writes, O glorify YHWH with me. It is alright to praise God by myself. When I'm singing loud in the car, I can praise God all by myself! But here the writer invites others to join in. Why don't you tell your story of how God brought you through? O glorify the Lord with me. Because when you tell your story, and you tell your story, we encourage one another, and we don't feel so alone. And, we find community.

We didn't read verse 19 of this Psalm. I have to leave something for you to do when you get home. (say amen for your neighbor) But I want to mention it because someone here needs to hear it. It reads, ***many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord (YHWH) rescues them from them all.*** In other words, faithfulness to God does not equal a carefree life. In fact, we can count on our hearts being broken, and disappointments, and unexpected deaths, and unfair treatment. But the good news is that God is with the broken hearted. God is with those who mourn and those who experience unjust treatment. Life and grace and mercy will be found in the midst of the storm, So I will bless the Lord at all times; God's praise will continually be in my mouth.

Perhaps my favorite verse of Psalm 34 is verse 8, ***O taste and see that the Lord is good.*** This is certainly a fitting verse on the day where we have our church picnic and street fair after service. O taste and see how good YHWH is! Here is another invitation to the hearer to try God and see what God will do.

Now, anything that speaks of food or tasting in scripture gets my attention. Sometimes we are reluctant to try new things, or new foods. Young and old people are hesitant to try new cuisine and new dishes. We are satisfied going to the same restaurant and ordering the same food. We won't try anything new because we may have heard mixed reviews, or the food is not part of our cultural cuisine. When I suggested to a group that we eat more meatless meals on Earth Day as a way to reduce our carbon footprint- I might as well have been speaking Greek. That suggestion didn't connect anywhere. Intentionally eating less meat was not part of that group's cultural norm. Yet, sometimes we need to step out of our comfort zone and try something new in order to get to a better place.

Sometimes all we need is a tiny taste of something new to have an exquisite experience. Some restaurants have tasting menus where we get a small amount of

something delectable. Just a little taste of something different may whet our appetite for more. What purest would have thought that salted caramel and dark chocolate would send one to the moon and back—until that first taste? Remember the first time you ate Kettle Corn? You were hooked after the first bite. A little taste can make one a convert.

The Psalmist wants us to step out of our mundane drudgery, and our destructive patterns of life and try God. O taste and see the goodness of God. Take a chance on God. If your way is stale and not working, try God. God just might have a better plan than you do.

Then, invite your loved ones to try God. If you know God can do anything but fail, reach out to those who are struggling and encourage them to try God. Followers of Jesus are often reluctant to invite others to follow the way of Jesus. We don't want to be confused with those other Baptists. We don't want to be identified with those bible thumping evangelicals. So, we miss opportunities to invite others to taste and see, how good YHWH is!

Yet, when the Seahawks, Sounders, or the Storm are in the playoffs, (like the Storm is right now) we can hardly contain our excitement. We want all our friends to know our team is #1. We want others to join us to watch the games and for game day parties. We have no problems inviting others to taste and see our playoff munchies, menu, and treats. So how about inviting others to taste and see, the goodness of God.

In fact, all of you who are not members of SFBC, I am personally inviting you to come and Explore with us what it means to follow the way of Jesus. Come taste and see how good YHWH is at SFBC. Come to the picnic this afternoon. Come participate in our Place at the Table gathering. Come praise the Lord with me and let us exalt God's name together. O taste and see that the Lord is good. Try it, you will like it!

I will praise YHWH at always. I will bless the Lord at all times God's praise will continually be on my lips. Come my sisters and brothers and glorify the Lord with me. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.