

Pastor Roy's sermon from September 15, 2013

The Hymn of Praise in our Liturgy: Lord God, Heavenly King, Almighty God and Father...

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In this week's worship element, the Hymn of Praise, we find prayers for mercy, gratitude and praise, and a God who is known only in relationship: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The hymn of praise is based mostly on phrases and verses taken from the book of Revelation. It is an early church confession of God's nature and our response.

The hymn celebrates God's far reaching mercy and power and our response of gratitude and praise. Sometimes God's mercy and power are evident clearly in our lives and experiences.

Sometimes we are confused and mystery surrounds God's mercy and power. For example, how is God's mercy and creative, redeeming power revealed in sickness, violent clashes, and terrible accidents? We don't get it. We long for sense in all things. Everything should make sense. Everything should be fair. Right?

But in these painful experiences, instead of sense and meaning, we find questions and mystery—a hidden God.

Faith grows as we grope in darkness. It's not pleasant, but it's true. When we face the challenge to trust God even when events do not go according to our plans and wishes. If we can cling to our faith that there is meaning in the universe and that meaning is God, even if we don't understand it.

We desperately want things to go our way. We hardly can help but feel we have a right to have things go well because to live is to want to live, to want to be well, to want our loved ones to be well. It is difficult to trust in the midst of pain. To trust that God loves us in our sorrow and loss even though it feels like we have been rejected and left alone.

In the Hymn of Praise we ask for mercy in our pain and our mistrust—when we have questions we can't answer. **Our lessons today invite us to consider and pursue the God who seeks those whom most would abandon as lost, forsaken, and hopeless.** The Israelites considered themselves deeply unworthy of mercy. That's what the story tells us when it suggests God had given up on them and Moses had to intervene. Have you ever felt that way? Paul felt the same way, but then he learned that God's mercy and his faith were a force for good. Plus the parables of the hopeless lost sheep and the coin. And there is cause for celebration in the finding of the lost—those who have given up hope. --us when we have given up hope.

So here is a God who gives us space to be lost, to not know. If we do not allow ourselves to ask questions and feel raw emotions, our faith will not be built on honest trust, but on masks, appearances, and dishonesty. True faith is not a facade but a confession of God's strength shown in our weakness. We *can* ask, Where is God in all this? What does it all mean? Why is it so hard to trust? We can confess our bafflement, our resentment, our anger. Therein lies our freedom, when we can be honest with ourselves, our neighbors, and God.

Our prayer for mercy in the Hymn of Praise is actually a confession of God's mercy. We know God is merciful. Our faith is built and patterned on mercy and love. We are reminding ourselves to take

courage in God's mercy. So the message of the Hymn of Praise is to embrace the mystery. Allow the doubts and questions—allow the unknowing to be the depths of our trust in a God who is intricately involved in everything I do and see—everything that happens to us.

We can join the dance even when it is a blind, deaf, dumb, paralyzed dance of true faith which does not rely on false certainties, but simply knows it is right to trust, and hope, and seek the peace of God which surpasses all understanding.

Yes, it is a challenge to trust with the pain we have come to know and all the questions which arise. To trust is not to claim knowledge about what cannot be known in this life, but to learn to fully let go of our right to be in control. The difference is that between secret or outright bitterness—and peace.

The Hymn of Praise is a statement of our faith in God's mysterious being and mercy, protection, pardon, and love for us—despite appearances sometimes otherwise.

So receive our prayer. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father, Amen.