***PRAISE THE LORD!***

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Texts: Psalm 148 and Romans 15:1-13

This past week an article of breaking news appeared on the front page of *The News Leader*. The article, entitled “Biologist models filter on fish’s mouth” described the work of William & Mary professor Laurie Sanderson who has been studying the mouths of filter-feeding fish (say that three times fast), specifically the paddlefish and basking shark. The question that gave rise to the study was this:

*How did such fish, from the foot-long menhaden to the 42-foot whale shark, manage to filter tiny food particles so naturally, so efficiently from the water flowing into their mouths and out again?*

What the biologist and her team found was that these fish have a complex mouth architecture, a series of bone ridges or gill arches that have the ability to form vortices or eddies in the flow of fluid. These vortices serve to separate and collect tiny food bits before the filtered water is expelled; unlike most filtration systems including your kitchen sink, they never clog. The findings were surprising because the biologists expected to find something like spaghetti caught in a strainer, but found instead that the architecture of the fish mouth enabled the particles to stream straight through at high speed to the back of the mouth, barely touching any of the complex structures of the mouth along the way.[[1]](#endnote-1) It is a model of effective efficiency which Sanderson and her team hope to duplicate in a manufactured filter that could have a host of industrial and scientific applications.

The universe in which we live is full of such amazing architecture – black holes that seem to swallow anything and everything in the far reaches of the cosmos, tiny genes that dictate the color of your hair if you have any, gravity that keeps our feet on the ground without crushing us, human fingerprints that are unique to each finger. To paraphrase the psalmist – our world is fearfully and wonderfully made – and the more we learn about the cosmos through the insights of astronomy, physics, biology, chemistry, geology, and the other sciences, the more fearfully and wonderfully made it seems to be! Far from reducing the sense of wonder in our world, new scientific discoveries inspire even greater awe, and should inspire praise for the divine creator who made all things great and small, suggests the psalmist. In this symphony of praise all creation plays a part!

The Psalter ends with six psalms whose focus is praise of the Lord. The first Hebrew word in each of those psalms is *Hallelujah* – Praise the Lord! A collection of 150 songs and poems begins with wisdom, weaves its way through lament

and cries for deliverance

and prayers for the king

and expressions of awe,

before ending in a crescendo of exuberant praise. Like all the manuscripts of Johann Sebastian Bach that end with *Soli Deo Gloria* – to God alone be the glory – the psalmist ends with a glorious chorus of praise that is shared by all creation. At the center of that chorus is this 148th Psalm that calls upon all things and all people in all places to praise the Lord!

Praise rings from the heavens in angelic voices and across the cosmos from shining stars and glowing moons. It echoes on earth

from monsters in the depths of the deep blue sea

and from storms that lash the land,

from snow-capped mountains and verdant plains,

from apple orchards and redwood forests,

from roaring lions and croaking frogs and howling dogs and mooing cows and chirping birds – and even the hiss of the snake.

Last but not best nor least, praise resounds from humankind – from rich and poor, young and old, male and female, saint and sinner. “Let them praise the name of the LORD! Let them praise Yahweh,” sings the psalmist, “for Yahweh’s name alone is exalted above earth and heaven!”

Our common calling with all creation is to praise the Lord. Why? Because with all creation we owe our very existence to the Lord who made all things, including each and every one of us. We are not divine, nor self-created. We are divinely created and wholly dependent upon the grace of God who shaped our existence with that of the cosmos across billions of years. Our praise acknowledges that we are not the creators but the creations, not the masters of all things but the things made by a divine master. Praise directs our attention away from ourselves to the object of our praise – the Lord who made us. Praise changes the world as we see it, a world in which an invisible God is very much present. Praise puts our lives in proper perspective as we count our blessings, turn away from ourselves, and bless the one from whom those blessings flow. Praise is thus an act of humble gratitude for our being and our blessings, an act of solidarity with the rest of creation that seems to have no problem singing God’s praise. In the words of the children’s song:

*All God’s critters got a place in the choir*

*Some sing low and some sing higher*

*Some sing out loud on a telephone wire*

*And some just clap their hands or paws or anything they got now.*

We human critters have a place in that choir of creation with all the rest of the critters and with the rest of creation itself. All things praise the Lord!

If we are to praise the Lord with the rest of creation, then our praise is not limited to a few songs on Sunday mornings within these walls, for creation’s songs of praise are a continuing chorus raised without end, day in and day out. According to the catechism, our chief end – our primary purpose – is to glorify God and to enjoy God forever. Glorifying God, praising the Lord, is our vocation! It is what we are called to do. As Walter Brueggemann expresses it:

*Praise is not only a human requirement and a human need, it is also a human delight. We have a resilient hunger to move beyond self, to return our energy and worth to the One from whom it has been granted. In our return to that One, we find our deepest joy. That is what it means to “glorify God and enjoy God forever.[[2]](#endnote-2)*

We are to glorify God, not because we have to, but because by the grace of God we can and perhaps even need to. We glorify God in what we say, in what we do, and in how we live. Our paws and jaws are gifts from God, and so some sing and some dance and some pray and some work – all to the glory of God. There are an infinite number of ways to praise and glorify the Lord our God.

Selman Waksman is a name few of you may know, but this Russian born professor changed the world. Tuberculosis was a deadly disease up until the middle of the last century when Waksman, a microbiologist at Rutgers, developed Streptomycin – a cure for TB – for which he received the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1952. Waksman traveled to Sweden to receive the award from the King of Sweden, and at the end of the ceremony all the Nobel prize winners processed down the aisle. As he arrived at the door Dr. Waksman met a little girl who was holding five red carnations. In English which she had learned for that moment, the little girl said to Dr. Waksman, “One is for each year in my life that you saved.” As an infant she had been dying of tuberculosis, but her doctor had read that a new drug had been found in America which could counteract and sometimes cure TB. So, the doctor contacted Dr. Waksman who had the drug flown to Sweden where it was injected into the little girl, saving her life. Dr. Waksman said that those five red carnations meant more to him than any of the other accolades he received.[[3]](#endnote-3)

What made that gift special? It was a gift from the heart in gratitude for the one who had saved her life. It is that kind of gift the psalmist calls us to offer to the God who grants us life and saves us in Christ, that kind of praise we are called to raise not just from our lips or hands but from our hearts – praise from the core of our being for the One who makes our being possible. That kind of praise finds expression in work that glorifies God and in play that glorifies God and in service that glorifies God and in song that glorifies God and in prayer that glorifies God and in all things that glorify God.

A young candidate for ministry was being examined on the floor of presbytery. He had endured a grueling couple of hours when an old elder rose and asked, “Sir, are you willing to be damned for the glory of God?” (the question being was there anything he wouldn’t do for the glory of God) The tired candidate replied, “Sir, I am willing for this whole presbytery to be damned for the glory of God!”

What then are you willing to do for God’s glory, to offer God your praise? What do your hallelujahs look like? What do they sound like? Perhaps they could look like you and sound like you – a living, breathing Hallelujah to the glory of God! Perhaps then we might pray to God with Walter Brueggemann:

*We are people who must sing you, for the sake of our very lives…*

*We are witnesses to your mercy and splendor;*

*we will not keep silent – ever again.[[4]](#endnote-4)*

Let the praises ring! Let God’s people sing forever and ever: Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Amen

1. “Biologist models filter on fish’s mouth”, Tamara Dietrich, *The News Leader*, April 18, 2016, p.1 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Walter Brueggemann, Israel’s Praise, Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1988, p.1 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. “Award Winners”, James A. Simpson, Life and Work, November 2015, p.47 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. “We Will Not Keep Silent”, Walter Brueggemann, *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth*, Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2003, p.133 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)