

CELEBRATION SUNDAY

Psalm 148; Prayer; The Woodcutter

**Psalm 148**

Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD from the heavens;  
praise him in the heights!

Praise him, all his angels;  
praise him, all his host!

Praise him, sun and moon;  
praise him, all you shining stars!

Praise him, you highest heavens,  
and you waters above the heavens!

Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for he commanded and they were created.

He established them forever and ever;  
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.

Praise the LORD from the earth,  
you sea creatures and all deeps,  
fire and hail, snow and frost,  
stormy wind fulfilling his command!

Mountains and all hills,  
fruit trees and all cedars!

Wild animals and all cattle,  
small creatures and flying birds!

Kings of the earth and all peoples,  
princes and all rulers of the earth!

Young men and women alike,  
old and young together!

Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for his name alone is exalted;  
his glory is above earth and heaven.

He has raised up his people,  
praise for all his faithful,  
for the people who are close to him.

Praise the LORD!

**Prayer:**

Thomas a Kempis: “Don’t be troubled about whether people are with you or against you, but take care that God be with you in everything you do.”

“Lord, you know the desires of my heart, and if it be pleasing to You, so be it. If it be to Your honor, Lord, be it done in Your name. Lord, if you see that it is expedient and profitable for me, then grant that I may use it to your honor. But if you know that it will be harmful to me, and of no good benefit to the welfare of my soul, then take this desire away from me. Lord, you know what is better for me; so let this be done or that be done as you please. Grant what you will, as much as you will, when you will. Do with me as you know best, as will most please you, and will be for your greater honor. Place me where you will and deal with me freely in all things. I am in your hand; turn me about whichever way you will. Behold, I am your servant, ready to obey in all things. Not for myself do I desire to live, but for you – would that I could do this worthily and perfectly!”

O Lord, indeed may our desires be your desires. May we give ourselves freely to you. Forgive us when we feel defensive and want to live life on our own terms, our own way. Help us remember that we are your children, and just like, with our own children, we know more and see a bigger picture, and want the best for them, so with us, you know more and see a bigger plan, and want the best for us. So may we want what you want always. Your will be done.

And we pray this Lord, not only for our own lives, but for this, your church, John Wesley. Particularly during this time in our country’s history, we have an opportunity to share what it means to follow you. To have hope, to enjoy internal peace, to love and to be loved. And to make a difference. There are people who are questioning, searching, and we have the answer – you. And so we pray that over this summer, with our beach services, our outdoor services, our sales, and other ways, that we might help others find you, know you, and grow closer to you. Use us the John Wesley United Methodist Church, Lord, for your purpose and your honor, as we pray our John Wesley prayer.

Dear Lord, we want John Wesley to be a strong and vital church in our community. And we want to be guided by your vision and plan for us. As we move into the future, please lead us all in our thoughts, our discussions, and our decisions. Show us what you would have us do and how you would have us do it. And help us always remember that John Wesley is your church, not ours – may your will be done. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen

## The Woodcutter<sup>1</sup>

Once there was an old woodcutter who lived in a tiny village. Although poor, he was envied by all, for he owned a beautiful white horse. Even the king coveted his treasure. A horse like this had never been seen before - such was its splendor, its majesty, its strength. People offered fabulous prices for the steed, but the old man always refused.

One morning he found that the horse was not in the stable. All the village came to see him. "You old fool," they scoffed, "we told you that you should have sold your horse. You could have gotten whatever price you wanted. No amount would have been too high. Now the horse has been stolen, and you've been cursed." The old man responded, "Don't speak too quickly. Say only that the horse is not in the stable. That is all we know; the rest is judgment. Whether it be a curse or a blessing, I can't say. All we can see is a fragment. Who can say what will come next?" The people of the village laughed. They thought that the old man was crazy. They had always thought he was a fool; if he wasn't, he would have sold the horse and lived off the money.

Two weeks past, and then the horse returned. He hadn't been stolen; he had run away into the forest. Not only had he returned, he had brought a dozen wild horses with him. Once again the village people gathered around the woodcutter and spoke. "Old man you were right and we were wrong. What we thought was a curse was a blessing. Please forgive us." The man responded, "Once again you go too far. How do you know if this is a blessing or not? Life is so vast, yet you judge all of life by just one situation. All anyone ever sees is just a fragment of life and you can't know what the future will bring." So they said nothing more.

The old man had a son, an only son. The young man began to break the wild horses, so they could be trained and sold for much money. After a few days, he fell from one of the horses and broke both legs. Once again the villagers gathered around the old man and cast their judgments. "Old man, you've been cursed again. The dozen horses were not a blessing. Your only son has broken his legs, and now in your old age you have no one to help you. Now you are poorer than ever." The old man spoke again. "You people are obsessed with judging. Don't go so far. Say only that my son broke his legs. Who knows if it is a curse or a blessing? No one knows. We only have a fragment. Life comes in fragments."

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<sup>1</sup> Max Lucado - In The Eye of the Storm

It so happened that a few weeks later the country engaged in war against a neighboring country. All the young men of the village were required to join the army. Only the son of the old man was excluded, because he was injured. Once again the people gathered around the old man, crying and screaming because their sons had been taken. There was little chance that they would return. The enemy was strong, and the war would be a losing struggle. They would never see their sons again. "You were right, old man," they wept. "God knows you were right. This proves it. Your son's accident was a blessing. His legs may be broken, but at least he is with you. Our sons are gone forever." The old man spoke again. "It is impossible to talk with you. You always draw conclusions. No one knows. Say only this: Your sons had to go to war, and mine did not. No one knows if it is a curse or a blessing. No one is wise enough to know. Only God knows."

And so this summer, as we continue to face change and the unknown, let us not be quick to draw conclusions or to judge. Let us have faith in the One who knows the whole story, that sees the big picture. And, as St. Paul said, "let run with endurance the race that is set before us. So that we might indeed receive that crown of victory." Amen.