



It's All About God!

Psalm 111

January 31, 2021

Everyone has been talking about her. If you watched the inauguration of Joe Biden, you know who Amanda Gorman is. She was the 22 year old who wrote and recited her poem "The Hill We Climb." I couldn't take my eyes off of her. Apparently, neither could the rest of the world. These are words people used to describe her poem: stunning, stole the show, wowed the crowd, an inspiration to us all.

I am a person who doesn't understand poetry, and as she recited her poem, I didn't understand most of what she said, but strangely enough, I felt it. Later when I read portions of it again, I began to understand it. Someone said she wrote it for the masses – in other words, someone like me who isn't grounded in poetry.

Later that evening, I listened to an interview with Amanda. The interviewer asked her how she wrote it. She described her meticulous research – using history, current news...and Twitter. She struggled for months with the poem and only had half of it finished. She wondered if she was up to the challenge. Then, the events of January 6 at the capital building. That night, she finished the rest of the poem.

As she read her poem, I caught a bit of scripture. She started with these words:

When day comes, we ask ourselves
Where can we find light
In this never-ending shade?

At the end of the poem, the lines that are most quoted, she answers her question:

When day comes, we step out of the shade
Aflame and unafraid.

The new dawn blooms as we free it
For there is always light
If only we're brave enough to see it
If only we're brave enough to be it.

At those last words, I immediately thought of Jesus when he said, "You are the light of the world." We are called to be brave enough to be the light.

Our scripture passage today is a poem. In just 175 words, the author of this poem summarizes the whole history of God's relationship with Israel. It is his poetic homage to the Lord. Before I ask Sue Horton to come up and read this beautiful poem, let us pray.

Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen

Read Psalm 111

I don't think a whole lot of you tweet, but if you do, you know space is limited to 280 characters. If you were to send a 280-character tweet praising God, what would you say? Our Psalmist was limited – a self-imposed limit of 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet –each phrase starting with a successive letter of the alphabet. 175 words.

The Psalmist packed a lot into those 175 words. After his opening "Praise the Lord," the Psalmist gives his thesis: God does wonderful deeds. Then he gives examples:

- God provides food.
- God keeps promises.
- God shows his power to others.
- God is faithful, just and trustworthy.
- God sent salvation to his people.

Not only does the Psalmist marvel at God's deeds, he makes a point to say they are eternal deeds. The word "ever" or forever" pops up five times in this short Psalm.

- Verse 3: God's righteousness endures *forever*.
- Verse 5: God remembers his covenant forever.
- Verse 8: God's precepts are trustworthy. They are established *forever and ever* (in case you didn't get that the first time!)
- Verse 9: God commanded his covenant *forever*.
- Verse 10: God's praise endures *forever*.

So, if our Psalmist wanted to sum this up by using Twitter, it could sound something like this: "Take it from me! If you trust in God, you can be sure that God will keep covenant with you. God is forever, my friend. God doesn't go back or take back, retract or redact, deny or dismiss!" #WhatGodsaysgoes.

In other words, this Psalm is all about God. It starts with a call to worship and ends with "To God belongs eternal praise."

Worship is all about God. It is not about you, or me, or this church and everything we do. Worship is not, first and foremost, about what we get out of it. Worship is not advice giving or advice taking. Worship is not about what we want or like or don't like in worship. Worship is all about God.

During the week, we are self-absorbed with everything we encounter during a week. But when we come to worship, we put our self-stuff aside (at least, we try as best we can) and turn our focus on the One who is larger than ourselves. We need a power greater than our own. We need a sense of hope outside of ourselves. We come to worship to find that. We come to worship God, and as a result, we are met by God.

When we worship, we, as did the Psalmist, ponder the works of God. Meditate on them. Study them. Delight in them. We sing about them. We pray about them.

Worship is the one thing that cannot be found anywhere else in the world. We do what the Psalmist says right off the bat: "I will extol the Lord with all my heart..."

Jesus said the first and greatest commandment tells us to love the Lord our God with everything we've got, with our heart and soul and mind. We are called to be lovers of God. Think about when you love someone. You love what that person loves, you are invested in what brings your partner joy.

We study, sing, pray about, hear the works of the Lord because the Bible tells us that God himself takes delight in those things.

I wrote in one of my email blasts this week about a mother who found a piece of paper. Her son had written on it, "Dear God, how are you?" Perhaps we should come here on Sundays, and ask God, "How are you?" Show an interest in what God loves. Listen to what God says to us in the scriptures, the liturgy, the message, the music. It's all about God.

Maybe another way to put it is to say, "You are all about God." You are God's person. If God created everything, including you for Himself, then shouldn't you be all about God?

Rick Warren in his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, started the book with these words, "It's not about you. The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It's far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God."

Scripture says, "For in him we live and move and have our being." It's all about God.

Each morning, I say this prayer: "I rise from bed to adore your Holy Name, to live for you this day, to work with you in the building of your kingdom, and enjoy eternal life in you. I consciously renew my call at the beginning of this day, grateful that I can serve you in this way." It's all about God.

And of course, this is not just about us as individuals. It is about us a church as well. This church should be all about God. In everything we do. Our goal is to praise God in everything...in all our ministries. As a church, in God we live and move and have our being.

Let's take for example the Congregational Care ministry, which includes the Deacons and the Parish Nurse. Five people from this ministry are helping in this worship service today. In fact, all five are the ones who check you in on Sunday mornings with temperature checks, hand sanitizer, taking your names and making sure we have your contact information. They want to keep you safe.

But this ministry is so much more. You can find a listing of all they do on our website under the "ministry" tab, or in the brochure you were given this morning. Here is some of those things:

- call people on their birthdays.
- They used to visit the homebound and those in assisted living situations...now, it is phone calls and cards.
- Grief ministry (which by the way, will be offering a Grief Recovery class in March. You can read about it in the Feb VV)
- Prayer ministry (boy, have we kept the prayer team busy), prayer shawls, prayer bears
- Medical team on Sundays
- Exercise classes when allowed
- Blood pressure clinic, flu clinic when allowed.

They represent God when they make that phone call, when they do a visit, when pray for you, when they send that card, when they make you follow our safety protocols. They bring the love of God to you through their ministry. And they do it because they love God and want to serve God. It's all about God.

One of the most beautiful privileges I had was working with this ministry on the Longest Night service about a month ago. In candlelight and for 15 minutes, we read the losses of people in the last year. We gave these losses to God, who takes them and redeems the loss. It is all about God.

Briefly, how can our other ministries be all about God?

Finance: When you talk about our money, may your thoughts be: what is the best way we can use the offerings that have come in to show God's love to others? It's all about God.

Buildings and Grounds: May your thoughts be: What is the best way this building can be used for God? How can our building look in such a way that people experience God's love? It's all about God.

Membership: May your thoughts not be so much about getting more members, but to focus on how we can share God's love with those who walk into our building. And how can we share God's love out there in our community? It's all about God.

Patio Sale: I know you are struggling, trying to find a way to have the sale in the midst of a pandemic. Normally, it involves a lot of people in small spaces, which of course cannot be done right now. So as you plan and figure it out, keep foremost in your mind that what you do is all about God. So think: how can the changes we make be about God? How can we continue to show God's love to people who come to our sale? It's all about God.

Right after this worship service, we will be having an annual meeting....looking back at this past year and looking forward. As you make decisions, remember, it is all about God. It is why we exist. Take a look at your ministry area and ask: How can what we do be all about God and not Valley Presbyterian Church?

May we as a congregation, as this Body of Christ, as this Family of God, as this People of God, as this Holy Temple, as this Bride of Christ rise from our beds to adore God's Holy Name, to live for Christ this day, to work with God in the building of God's kingdom, and enjoy eternal life in the One who created us.

What is it all about? Say with me: It's all about God.

