

I want to begin by quoting Psalm 67, which we'll hear again put to music later. The psalmist says, "Let the people praise you, oh God." Praise is the theme of our service today. We began by singing, O Praise Ye the Lord, and we'll end ... the final hymn will be, O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing My Great Redeemer's Praise.

This is entirely fitting, as today we celebrate the dedication of our wonderful new organ, which has been many years in the making, a great instrument of praise that will lead the congregation here in praise of God for many, many generations to come.

I've been thinking about praise over the summer. I've been pondering the question of why it is we're called to praise God. I've been thinking about it a lot because I've never actually quite understood the answer. Why does God need our praise? If it's not for his benefit, why should we be bothered to praise? I've read some serious books over the summer in pursuit of an answer, but nothing quite made sense to me. I still wasn't sure why we should praise God. If anybody asked me, I didn't quite know what to say.

Then a friend told me a silly story the other week and the penny dropped. I had an insight into why we should praise. The friend, who's also a priest, told me that a married couple had come to see him. They'd been married 40 years, but they were having difficulties in their marriage, and the wife was threatening to leave. So, he called them in, and he said to the wife, "Well, what's up?" He said, "Well, he never tells me he loves me." So, my friend turned to the husband and said, "Well, is that true?" He said, "Well, yes, it is." He said, "Oh, why is that?" He said, "Well, I told her I loved her on the day we got married, and if anything changes, I'll let her know." Now, of course, that's ridiculous. Of course, he should have said that he loved her.

But why? The logical side of me, and I'm tortured with a sort of overly rational, logical side, I could sympathize with the husband. I could understand why he said what he did, but I also recognize that it's deeply wrong. It's wrong because lovers keep

telling one another how they love each other because the delight is incomplete until it's expressed. Giving expression to our love makes it complete.

I get a sense of this when I'm watching a beautiful sunset. If I'm watching it on my own, I regret not having someone there to share it with. It doesn't feel quite complete. I want to be able to turn to someone and say, "Isn't that magnificent? Isn't that beautiful?" If I can't do that, it doesn't make the sunset any less beautiful. It doesn't make what I'm seeing any less magnificent, but I feel there's a lack if I can't give expression to the wonder of what I'm seeing. Giving expression to beauty leads to an overflow of enjoyment that leads and flows into praise. Praise perfects perfection. St. Paul gets this. He says in our epistle from Philippians, "Make my joy complete."

Well, so much for the why of praise. What about the how? There are many and various ways to praise God, but for millennia, people have found the supreme vehicle for praise to be music. Hear this from the Hebrew scriptures, "And David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the Lord with songs and lyres and harps, with tambourines and castanets and cymbals." Then we've just heard Psalm 150, which the choir sang so beautifully. "Praise God with the sound of trumpet. Praise him upon the lute and harp. Praise him upon the strings and pipe. Praise him upon the loud cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord." Our postlude today is by Johann Sebastian Bach, who said this, "All music should have no other end and aim than the glory of God and the soul's refreshment." He ended all his scores with the letters, S-D-G, which stood in Latin for "to God alone be the glory".

Music helps us to praise God. It gives voice to our praise. A big part of that is that it moves us, it speaks to our emotions. John Calvin, the Swiss reformer, not one known for his excessive emotionalism, said this, "Music excites piety," and he encouraged his congregation to, "Sing until we feel our hearts ascending with our tongues."

I want to encourage you, our wonderful congregation, to sing, to sing out. We celebrate today the dedication of our wonderful new organ. It's rightly called the king of instruments because it takes up the whole sound of creation. It gives resonance to the fullness of human feeling. The manifold possibilities of the organ in some ways remind us of the immensity and the magnificence of God.

But it's significant that we dedicate this organ in the context of our worship service. This great instrument is primarily here to support us, the congregation, in our singing and worship of God. We don't come to church to listen to the organ. We come to be led and accompanied by the organ as we lift our tongues in praise to God. That's why I want to encourage everyone to sing.

Wesley, the great hymn writer, who we'll be singing this hymn later, didn't write when he wrote this final hymn, "O for a thousand organs to sing my great Redeemer's praise" (what a cacophony that would be) no, "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing My Great Redeemer's Praise".

Remember what Paul said in his reading, we heard from Philipians? "Let every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." To quote another Swiss (they're having a good day today) the theologian Karl Barth said, "The praise of God, which finds its concrete culmination in the singing of the community is one of the indispensable forms of the ministry of the church." Let's sing out. Let's follow the lead of the organ and the choir who are here to support us.

If you think you can't sing, no one wants to hear you make a noise, just remember, the organ is very, very loud. No one can hear. We're all called to praise God together. As a sign of that, when I bless and dedicate this organ to God a bit later in our service, I'll sprinkle water on it or asperge it, to use the technical term. On our way down to asperge the antiphonal organ at the back of the church, I'll sprinkle you as well, the congregation, as a sign that we're in this together. We worship God and praise God together, choir, organ, and

congregation. We all need to be blessed in our worship and praise of God. We're to be one, united in our praise of God, our Creator. "Let all the peoples praise you, O God." Amen.