

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Sunday, October 9, 2022
Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev Dr Scott Couper
“Great Are You Lord”
Fourth of four in a sermon series entitled “Devotional Songs of Praise”
Hebrew Scripture: Psalm 111



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This morning, we come to the end of our sermon series on praise and worship music. We have used this series not such much to advocate for a style of music, but rather to highlight and appreciate lyrics as devotionals that lift our spirits and deepen our faith.

This series is a tribute to you, the members of Centre Church, who have rightfully expressed a desire to be fed spiritually at Centre Church. I pray that this series might curb some of your hunger. Many of you have inspired this series. Joy

Everett confided to me that she enjoys and often listens to contemporary Christian music (as does her daughter, Lisa).

Bob Keller, who we honored in a beautiful memorial service yesterday, encouraged me to attend what he and Dee knew as the 'Dutch Chapel' in Istanbul, Turkey during my visit there. The Dutch Chapel is a Christian church in the midst of a Muslim land whereby Christians worshipped in peace within the walls of the Netherlands' consulate. Today, the church is called the 'Union Church of Istanbul'. On Sunday morning, August 21, my son Micah and I attended the service. The hour of worship there was one of the most memorable experiences that I had in Turkey. It was memorable because I successfully pilgrimage-ed to the church that meant so much to Bob and Dee. The pilgrimage engendered a deep connection between me and them. I worshipped with them through time and space. This sermon series simply reflects upon the same songs, in the same order, that we sang that morning. I hope the songs and lyrics foster a deep connection between you and I as we worship at the same time and in the same space. This morning for the last song of our series, we listen to the last song of that service: "Great Are You, Lord".

Bonnie Girvan has with me initiated a Contemplative Prayer service on Wednesday evenings whereby we rotate weekly silent, centering, *lectio divina*, and breath prayer. Bonnie's forté is the 'breath prayer' where she leads us through

a guided meditation. During our meditation, Bonnie asks us to focus on our breath. In focusing on our breath, Bonnie emphasizes that our bodies are key to our spirituality and thus to our experiencing God. Now as a Protestant, Reformed, New England Congregationalist, all that Bonnie teaches makes me a bit uncomfortable. My inadequate faith is primarily cerebral, intellectual, and *theological*. My stunted faith leads me to sit down, be quiet, and listen. My immature faith leads me to bow my head, fold my hands, and be reserved. My still developing faith sadly is incarcerated in physical propriety. Yet, our faith ought to be sourced physically. Our faith ought to also manifest itself physically. Does this not make sense people?! We, as Christians, are incarnational people! The body, the body of Jesus, is the lynchpin, the crux, the core, and center of our Christian faith. How can the body, our bodies, not be essential to experiencing the divine?!

Our wise, beautiful, loving, and learned friend Amer Latif pointed this out to all of us yesterday at Bob Keller's memorial service. Did you not have shivers run up and down your spine as Farid Emami, the imam who leads Muslim worship in the Wells Wing, recited the Qur'an in his Call to Prayer? Did you not have goosebumps as we listened to a deeply evocative call in a language we do not speak with our tongue but many of us do with our hearts? Did you not get a lump in your throat when you heard the sacred language 1.9 billion Muslims speak as you sit in church pews in which 2.5 billion Christians would worship? Did you not

feel one with 4.4 billion people, despite all of our horrible efforts to divide ourselves? Yesterday, we experienced shivers, goosebumps, lumps in our throats, tears, perspiration, and even runny noses (yes, even a runny nose can be a sign of presence of God with us) thus proving that we are incarnational people and our bodies react to the sensing and presence of the divine in our lives!¹

The praise and worship song we focus today understands the body to be a medium for worship. “It’s your breath in our *lungs*”. “Our *hearts* will cry”. “These *bones* will sing...Great are you Lord!” The song is deeply incarnational in the sense that in Hebrew the word ‘breath’, *Ruach*, means respiration, spirit, and wind.² The song proclaims the same *ruach* that was breathed into Adam (Genesis 2:7). It is the same *ruach* that was breathed into the bones Ezekiel declared to be living (Ezekiel 37:5). It is the same *ruach* that is heard during Pentecost when the church was founded (Acts 2:2). And if perhaps any may utter distain at the repetitive nature of the song, well, the beat of your heart is quite repetitive – and I thank God for that repetition. There is good and right reason why sacred music is often repetitive. Repetition invokes the breath we breathe and the beat of our hearts.

¹ At an installation service after I preached this message, Michael Mario reminded me, as we put on our robes, that perspiration is also a physical manifestation of our bodies’ quickening and thus a reaction to the spirit of God influencing us.

² FIRM staff, “The Hebrew Word *Ruach* and God’s Breath in Our Lungs”, Fellowship of Israel Related Ministries, June 12, 2021. Found at: <https://firmisrael.org/learn/the-hebrew-word-ruach-and-gods-breath-in-our-lungs/>, accessed October 9, 2022.

Similar to the song “Great Are You, Lord”, Psalm 111 is also incarnational. Right off the bat, the first line, reads, “I will extol the Lord with all my heart”. Yes, memory plays a part. Yes, good works plays a part. Yes, understanding and wisdom are key.³ Yet, it starts with the heart. It starts with the heart which is supplied breath by the lungs. So, let God’s breath be in our lungs and may we praise God with our hearts. Friends, as we listen to the song “Great Are You, Lord”, feel free to sing along and allow your body to respond to the Spirit of God within you and us.

This was the word of God, and it was preached to all of you, the people of God. And the people of God responded, “Amen”!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQLMnPYoR9k>, **Great Are You, Lord**

You give life, You are love
You bring light to the darkness
You give hope, You restore
Every heart that is broken
And great are You, Lord

It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise
We pour out our praise
It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise to You only

You give life, You are love
You bring light to the darkness
You give hope, You restore (You restore)
Every heart that is broken
And great are You, Lord

³ Geoffrey Grogan, *Psalms*, in *The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 186.

It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise
We pour out our praise
It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise to You only

It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise
We pour out our praise
It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise to You only

And all the earth will shout Your praise
Our hearts will cry, these bones will sing
Great are You, Lord

And all the earth will shout Your praise
Our hearts will cry, these bones will sing
Great are You, Lord

And all the earth will shout Your praise
Our hearts will cry, these bones will say
Great are You, Lord

It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise
We pour out our praise
It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise to You only

It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise
We pour out our praise
It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise to You only

Source: [Musixmatch](#)

Songwriters: Jason Ingram / David Leonard / Leslie Jordan

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