

## *And Still*

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First Presbyterian Church  
McMinnville, Oregon

### **Psalm 67 (NRSV)**

*May God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make God's face to shine upon us,      Selah  
that your way may be known upon earth,  
your saving power among all nations.  
Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you.*

*Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,  
for you judge the peoples with equity  
and guide the nations upon earth. Selah  
Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you.*

*The earth has yielded its increase;  
God, our God, has blessed us.  
May God continue to bless us;  
let all the ends of the earth revere God.*

On Wednesday, a group of us gathered for Bible Study on Zoom. I began the Bible Study by reading the scripture and asking, "what do you think?" This tends to be my first question to get people's initial reactions. I asked, "what do you think?" *\*\*silence\*\** No one spoke.

I asked the question again with a bit more prompting "what is your initial reaction? What stands out to you? There's no wrong answer." Eventually someone hesitantly spoke up and said, "it just seems so straightforward, it's a simple Psalm of praise". The others began to agree, "it's a simple Psalm of praise."

We went on to have a great discussion as we dove further into the text. But as the week progressed, this initial idea of praise being simple or easy or straight forward stuck with me. And to be honest, I can't remember the exact wording that was used in the Bible Study. I'm not sure if the word "simple" was used or if that was just me projecting my feelings into my remembering. Nonetheless, I found myself thinking, what is there to say? Does praise really happen without an agenda? Is there no depth to praise?

The Bible is filled with challenges and charges and mandates. The Bible tells us to put on the armor of God; the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation. The Bible is filled with language of battles and confrontations. It spurs us on to be strong and courageous. It commands us to love deeply and trust relentlessly. The Psalms themselves give us permission to rail against God with doubt, anger, and fear. The Psalms give us the wording to express our hopes, laments, and wonderings.

And then we come to Psalm 67. A Psalm of praise. A pause in all the doing, to acknowledge God. A deep breath; a sigh. A timeout to reorient ourselves back to God. A reminder of who God is and what God is about. Psalm 67 is the “and still”. And still God is gracious and blesses us. And still the peoples praise you. And still the nations sing for joy. And still you engage us with equity. And still the peoples praise you. And still God continues to bless us. And still. Psalm 67 is a pause.

I don't know about you, but I don't pause very well. Its one thing to take a breather in the midst of reading scripture, and it's a whole other thing to pause and take a breather in life. I don't normally significantly pause until I'm completely burned out, until it is forced upon me. I don't pause well.

In fact, as this pandemic started, I was part of the group who looked at the social distancing that was implemented in March and welcomed it as a time to accomplish everything I had been putting off. I deep cleaned my house; rearranging furniture and creating a growing piled of things to donate. I consolidated my book collection. I filed a growing stack of paper. I read the books on my nightstand. I watched some of the TV shows and movies that people had recommended. I tackled some half-completed craft projects. I even started puzzling again, something I love to do but rarely had the time to do previously. I kept adding to my To-Do list and frantically checked things off, hoping that the social distancing wouldn't be lifted before I had completed all of my To-Dos.

And then May came. 60 days into our stay at home orders. And I wept. I sat in my clean, organized house, forced to finally pause. And I wept. Because here's the thing, for those of us who are pause-adverse, when we finally stop, we don't know what to do. Because pausing *isn't about* doing, pausing is *about* being. The pause of Psalm 67 is just that, its about being present. Psalm 67 isn't about the doing. Psalm 67 states you are God and because you are God, I am blessed.

Psalm 67 doesn't negate all that this is going on. Psalm 67 doesn't ignore the 168,000 deaths from Covid-19 in the United States. The Psalm doesn't ignore the radical racial reconciliation that is happening. The Psalm doesn't begin by saying “now that everything is done, and nothing is going on...” In fact, Psalm 67 is thought of as a harvest Psalm. A Psalm that is said is said when the land demands the most of us. A Psalm that pauses in the midst of all the doing, to recognize God who is gracious to us.

And while Psalm 67 is a Psalm of pause, a Psalm of “and still”, there is a continued action in the Psalm itself. Verse 1 begins by saying “May God be gracious to us and bless us”, it is forward looking. And the Psalm ends in verse 7 by saying “May God continue to bless us”, it acknowledges that God has already blessed us. The pause of the Psalm is not a pause of God, its praise of the God that has been and the God that always will be.

Even the Psalmist united the “has been” and “always will be” by referencing the ancient words of Numbers 6:24-26:

*The Lord bless you and keep you;  
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;  
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.*

These are familiar words that would have been well known to the first hearers of the Psalm. And then the Psalmist continues on, uniting these well-loved words with present day happenings. The greatness of God is spreading among the nations, the earth is yielding its harvest, God is still God and we are still God’s people.

My favorite wording in the Psalm is “May God...make God’s face to shine upon us, that your ways may be known upon all the earth”. God shines upon us. As God blesses us, we shine with God’s blessing and graciousness. So much so that all the earth takes note. God’s blessing is not just for us, it’s for ALL the nations. Our pause highlights the work that God has been doing and continues to do in our lives and in *all* the earth.

I want to leave you with a challenge. I’m going to do this challenge and I hope that you will join me. Take time to pause each day this upcoming week. Maybe for you the best time to pause is in the morning when the house is still, and the day hasn’t yet begun. Maybe its in the afternoon as you transition from one thing to the next. Maybe it’s the end of the day as you wind down. Whenever is best for you, take a moment to pause. And in your pause write down 3 praises. You can think of these as joys or highlights. They could be things that just happened or more abstract thoughts. Write them down in a journal, or scrap piece of paper, or on an envelope from the mail, or even in the Notes app on your phone. Writing them down is key because it makes the pausing less passive and more intentional. And at the end of the week notice how the pausing and praising reoriented your week and how it reoriented your focus on God.

May God be blessed in our doing, but also in our pausing. Amen.