

## **Mark 1: 4 – 11**

### **“Praise be to God”**

What a wonderful city Washington DC is!

Valmai and I had the pleasure of spending some time there in 2006, visiting such precincts as:-

Lincoln Memorial, White House, Capitol Hill, Jefferson Memorial, National Gallery of Art, Natural History Museum, Museum of American History, Washington Monument, Smithsonian, Air & Space Museum, Vietnams Veterans Memorial & Korean War Memorial, Arlington Cemetery, Kennedy Centre etc, etc.

On the aluminium cap atop the Washington Monument in Washington DC are two words, **“Laus Deo”**.

No one can see these words.

In fact most visitors to the monument have no idea they are even there and for that matter hardly care!

**But they are there 555 feet 5.125 inches .perched atop the monument to the father of the nation.**

Overlooking the 69 sq miles which comprise the District of Columbia, capital of the United States of America.

Laus Deo! Two seemingly insignificant, unnoticed words out of sight, and, one might think, out of mind but very meaningfully placed at the highest point over what is the most powerful city in the world.

And what might those two words comprised of just four syllables and only seven letters mean?

**Very simply ”Praise be to God”.**

Though construction of this giant obelisk began in 1848 when James Polk was President of the United States, it was not until 1888 that the monument was inaugurated and opened to the public.

**It took 25 years to finally cap the memorial with the tribute, Laus Deo....”Praise be to God”.**

From atop this magnificent granite and marble structure a visitor can take the beautiful panoramic view of the city with its division into four major segments.

And from that vantage point one can easily see a perfect cross imposed upon the landscape with the White House to the North, the Jefferson Memorial to the South the Capitol to the East and the Lincoln Memorial to the West.

### ***A cross .you say?***

How interesting! And no doubt intended to carry a meaning for those who bother to notice....”Praise be to God”.

Within the monument itself are 898 steps and 50 landings. As one climbs the steps and pauses at the landings the memorial stones share a message. (We did not climb this monument)

On the 12<sup>th</sup> landing is a prayer offered by the City of Baltimore; on the 20<sup>th</sup> is a memorial presented by some Chinese Christians; on the 24<sup>th</sup> a presentation made by Sunday School children from New York and Philadelphia quoting:-

**Proverbs 10:7, “The memory of the righteous will be a blessing; But the name of the wicked will rot.”**

**Luke 18:16, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these”**

**And Proverbs 22:6, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.”**

### **“Praise be to God”**

When the cornerstone of the Washington Monument was laid on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1848 deposited within it were many items including the Holy Bible presented by the Bible Society.

### ***“Praise be to God”***

Such was the discipline, the moral direction, the spiritual mood given by the founder and first President of the unique democracy...“One nation, under God.”

With Barak Obama’s Presidency about to commence, it worth while to reflect on Washington’s prayer for America....

**“Almighty God; We make our earnest prayer that thou wilt keep the United States in Thy Holy protection; that Thou wilt incline the hearts of the citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to government; and entertain a brotherly affection and love for one another and for their fellow citizens of the United State at large”.**

**And finally that Thou wilt most graciously be pleased to dispose us all to do justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that charity, humility, and pacific temper of mind which were the characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed religion, and without a humble imitation of whose example in these things we can never hope to be a happy nation.**

**Grant our supplication, we beseech Thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Amen.**

### **Mark 1:4-11**

#### **Praise is important.**

Praise generally makes us feel appreciated and it gives us a sense that people care about us.

Praise received is only one side of a coin.

The other side if that coin is praise given.

How do we praise our God in a way that truly honors Him?

How does praise given like?

Is it a matter of singing a certain style of song – a praise song?

Is it a matter of words or prayers that we speak?

The Gospel Lesson today offers us one of the most beautiful examples of praise.

We read that after Jesus was Baptized by John the Baptist, God said, **“You are my Son, whom I love. I am pleased with you.”**

Wow! Wouldn’t it be wonderful to hear this kind of praise from our God?

Wouldn’t it be absolutely awesome to know that God loves us and is pleased with us the same way as He was with Jesus at his Baptism?

What can we learn from the Gospel Lesson today regarding praise given and received?

What did Jesus do so that God spoke those wonderful words of affirmation to Him?

How can we receive God’s praise?

Today we will use the word **“Praise”**, **“P” “R” “A” “I” “S” “E”** to learn about how to honor God with our praise and also to receive praise from Him.

Each letter will help us to remember something from the Gospel Lesson and what it means to us in our life.

#### **The first letter of praise is “P” and it stands for, “Present.”**

Jesus presented Himself to be baptized.

Jesus was God “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” (John 1:1)

Jesus could have rightly said that He didn’t need to be baptized.

Jesus was holy and sinless and therefore didn’t need the forgiveness that we receive in Baptism.

Nevertheless, He allowed John to Baptize Him.

Now John knew that in Baptizing Jesus, he would be ministering to very God of very God.

It’s clear John was aware of this. That’s why John says: “The one who comes after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to bend down and untie his sandal straps. I have baptized you with the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 1:7 – 8)

He knew that by allowing himself to be baptized by John, Jesus was humbling Himself.

And that's the way it happened.

Jesus willingly and deliberately presented Himself to be baptized and in so doing, identifies Himself with the fallen Creation.

There's a story about a woman who had lived a very sinful life.

When she recognized how much God cared about her and how much she needed God's forgiveness, she presented herself before Jesus.

She sat at his feet.

With her tears she washed His feet.

Her simple act of humility is a wonderful act of praise to our Lord.

By presenting herself for forgiveness at the feet of Jesus, she showed her need and love for God.

Jesus pointed out her humility and love to the proud religious teachers and praised her and forgave her sins. (Luke 7: 36 – 50)

We can learn from that too.

In order to praise God there is a need to present ourselves before our God.

We need to bring our sinfulness and brokenness before the Lord.

By doing this we show that we need Him. We demonstrate that He is important to us.

#### **Praise, "P" "R": "R" stands for Receive.**

By humbling Himself, Jesus received Baptism from John.

Verse 9 of our Gospel Lesson says: "At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan River" (Mark 1:9)

Jesus came and allowed Himself to receive the blessings that the Father offered. God could have caused His blessing to come forth in many different ways. But He has ordained specific ways for us to receive His blessings.

Jesus knew this and so He presented Himself to receive the blessing of God by coming to be baptized by John.

God has offered ways for us to receive His blessing too.

He has given us a place to gather to receive from Him.

He has given us His Baptism to receive faith and forgiveness.

He has offered us a place to receive Christ's Body and Blood.

He has offered us a way to receive power for living through His Word in Bible Studies and Worship Services.

You see, to truly praise God, we need to first receive from God.

John the Apostle writes: "He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God." (John 1:11 – 12)

If we don't receive what God offers "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" we cannot truly praise Him. But if we receive Jesus, we also receive the power to be children of God. To praise God we present ourselves and receive from Him.

#### **Praise, "A" stands for approval:**

Jesus received God's approval when He came to John to be baptized.

Our Gospel Lesson says, "As Jesus came out of the water, He saw heaven split open" (Mark 1:10a)

The heavens opened up to Jesus – the obedient God Man who had humbled Himself.

By submitting Himself to be baptized, He showed He would not turn away from what awaited Him, a horrible bloody Cross.

It is in that Cross of Jesus that we find our approval too.

We are approved by God through the forgiveness that we receive for the sake of Christ.

He washes us in Jesus' blood and the heavens open up for us as they opened up for Jesus on the day of His Baptism.

To truly praise God beloved, we need to have God's approval and that we find only through the Cross.

**Praise, "I" stands for Ignite:**

Jesus was baptized with the Holy Spirit. Mark writes: "The Spirit came down upon Him like a dove." (Mark 1:10b)

This outpouring of the Spirit was Jesus' anointing for ministry, an anointing that Jesus Himself claimed.

Remember when He went to his home town and stood in the synagogue and said: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18 – 19)

The Apostles could not understand nor did they have the power to do God's will until they were "ignited" with the power of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

It is so in our lives.

Without God's Holy Spirit igniting our faith lives, we cannot truly praise God. And it is only in that power that God finds what we do for Him acceptable.

**Praise, "S" stands for set out or start:**

Jesus' Baptism marks the start of his journey to the cross.

In the first of many examples of humility and selflessness, Jesus starts work of connecting us and all people to God's mercy and grace.

And God was praised because Jesus willingly set out on that walk to Golgotha.

It took that resolute commitment to God's mission to truly honor God.

And Jesus, by setting out on this painful journey, was glorified and praised by God.

Beloved in Christ, our Baptism marks the start of our walk with God.

It is a life-long walk in mission.

*Our Father is honored when we set out and become a part of that mission He has given to the whole Church.*

He has told us to speak of Jesus.

He has told us to tell others about the faith.

He has told us to tell our friends about the salvation that is available in the Cross and the Empty Tomb.

To praise God, we need to start our walk down that mission path, the mission path that Jesus followed all the way to His death on the Cross and the glory of a wonderful Resurrection on Easter morning.

**Finally, the "E" stands for exalt:**

God exalted His Son. The Gospel says: "You are my Son, whom I love. I am pleased with you." (Mark 1:11)

It is absolutely incredible that God would praise the Son in such an incredible and miraculous way.

This is a signal to us to recognize Jesus; to trust Jesus; to honor Jesus; to fall at the feet of Jesus; to know that the Son is exalted by the Father and the Holy Spirit.

**And do you know what?**

The real wonder is that God does the same for us sinners.

In the forgiveness that He washes us with, we are exalted.

The Psalmist writes: "What is man that you are mindful of him, the Son of man that you care for him? You made Him a little lower than the heavenly being and crowned Him with glory and honor." (Psalm 8:4 – 8)

We are given a place in the Kingdom as sons and daughters of the Living God. Even though we are imperfect sinners, God lifts us to the heavenly realms.

**"Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:57)**

Present ourselves to God in response to His grace; when we receive forgiveness from God for Jesus' sake; when God gives us his approval through the holiness Christ gives us; When our lives are ignited by His Holy Spirit; When we set out on the mission of sharing Christ's salvation; When God is exalted in our lives as He empowers us to live for Him. Amen.