

Praise among all the people (Psalm 67)

The psalmist calls for something that is hard for us to imagine.

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There is nothing better than seeing people who are different come together for a common purpose.

We see a glimpse of this when we gather for worship. People come together with different experiences and at different ages and stages of life. It is so fulfilling to hear voices raised for a collective confession, a communal prayer, and a congregational hymn. It makes sense for the gathered people of God to be of one accord in worship.

The common goal is understood by the people of God. We come to praise God and to leave a little different than the way we entered the space. Hearts are transformed through the preaching of the word and through the self-offering that comes by way of the grace and generosity we bestow on others.

The psalmist calls for the entire nation to come together to praise God. The nation gathers to proclaim a central message that God is good and has blessed the people. The unified nation comes together for a common purpose and a visible witness. Through public praise to the only wise and loving God, the nation bears witness to the character of that God—a God of hope, mercy, compassion, and justice.

It is hard for us to imagine a nation coming together for cohesive and collective praise. It is easier to conceive of a small community or congregation glorifying God in unity.

In this day and age, there are many times when the public Christian witness is polarized and divided. There are denominational differences, various theological perspectives, and arguments about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. There are days when it is hard to tell by our work and our worship if we are all talking about the same faith.

I would imagine that in the psalmist's day there was human division and strife among the nations as well. And yet this nation of God's own people are being called upon to lift up united voices of praise. Perhaps the truth here is that in the face of brokenness and discord, praise is what has the power to bring us together. If we begin our days and end our evenings with gratitude to our God, maybe, just maybe, we can find a common thread. If we give praise for life, for health, for strength, for resources, for love, and for each new moment, maybe praise will help us to understand that life is precious and we are all precious in God's sight.

The call for the nations to come together to glorify God is a call that reminds us what really matters. God must be at the center so that our lives can be centered and re-centered around love, peace, compassion, hope, and justice. If we don't praise God together, we may be tempted to praise our own efforts—and to stay fixated on circling the wagons of people who are just like us. But if we praise our God, our God who draws the circles wider than we could ever imagine, maybe we will be held together by God's grace as a holy nation and royal priesthood filled with humility and hope.