

Praise for a delighted God (5B) (Psalm 147:1-11, 20c)

Unlike Psalm 150, which praises God with abandon just because, our psalmist of the day cites some reasons.

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I don't know how you buy books. Usually I plunk down money: 1) if I already respect the author, 2) if someone I trust suggests it, or 3) if I can pre-read enough online to get a sense of it.

If, however, I venture out to a brick-and-mortar store and some volume calls to me from a shelf, I examine it by taking a look at the first pages and the last; if they don't cohere, I'll check out a bit in the middle. This can be quite helpful, though of course it doesn't apply to mysteries.

It does help with some books of the Bible. Psalms begins with an us-vs.-them world in which the righteous and the wicked are clearly delineated and the latter are doomed (Psalm 1), whereas the end of the book sees everything that has breath deliriously praising God with raucous hallelujahs, presumably even the aforementioned wicked (Psalm 150). To reconcile that disparity, one really must go more deeply into the book.

Psalm 147, in whole and in part, is decidedly in the camp of its proximate neighbor. But unlike 150, which praises God with abandon just because, our psalmist of the day cites some of the reasons for that raucous praise.

After romping through a random catalog of motives for thanking their liberating, creative God, Israel pauses to speculate: *We are thrilled with all of the mighty acts we've listed in the initial 10 verses, and we're right thankful, but we're wondering: what about you, God? What is it that prompts you to act as you do?* Their conclusion (verse 11) is neither a surprise nor particularly new. God delights in people, especially in two certain types of discipling people.

That God has a preference for God-fearers is well attested—particularly in the Wisdom tradition and especially in the book of Proverbs—but what the psalmist cites in the second part of the psalm stems from something even older in the tradition. The word translated variously as “steadfast love,” “mercy,” “compassion/love,” and “covenant loyalty” hearkens back to the covenant at Sinai.

The word (*hesed* in Hebrew) means all of the things listed above, but it also functions as a kind of code word for Israel. From the covenant forward, the children of Israel owe a particular kind of allegiance not only to their God but also to one another. *Because you are a fellow member of the People of God, I will be there for you. If you're hungry, I'll feed you; thirsty, I'll provide drink.*

Sound familiar? Luke's Good Samaritan not only knows about *hesed* but practices it abundantly, not counting the cost. Ditto Matthew's teaching about the sheep and the goats and even John's “Love one another as I have loved you.” Jesus, of course, is a practitioner *par excellence* of this mighty virtue.

If that's not enough for you, consider this: it is one of the crowning and distinguishing characteristics of God. (See especially Exodus 34:6.)