

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Psalm 113**

**Sermon: “Joyful Work”**

The readings for the day offer a stark contrast between the ways of the world and the ways of God. In particular, the Old Testament Reading and the Gospel condemn the ways of the world, while the Psalm celebrates the ways of God.

In the Old Testament Reading, Amos reveals the greed of God’s people. Focused on profit, they abuse God’s holy days and, hoping to make a gain for themselves, they reject God’s regard for the poor. The use of dialogue is powerful. Amos invites us to overhear the concrete way people speak when they are concerned only about themselves.

In Luke, the Pharisees overhear Jesus tell a parable about a shrewd manager. In the parable, the manager appears to be gracious to others, lowering their debts, but, ultimately, if you listen to how he talks to himself, he is doing it only out of regard for himself. Upon hearing this parable, the Pharisees ridicule Jesus. Jesus responds by telling them that “what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.” Again, the ways of the world are condemned. When people exalt themselves over others, God views them as an abomination.

In the context of these two readings, the Psalm offers a powerful contrast. Here, one finds God's gracious irony at work. God is celebrated not as one who exalts himself at the expense of others but as the one who humbles himself that others might be exalted. God's grace raises that which is low and enriches that which is poor.

Ultimately, this gracious contrast is made known most fully to us on the cross. At the death of Jesus, what is an abomination before people and God (the crucified Christ) is exalted by God for the people (Jesus is Lord and by his death accomplishes our salvation). For this, we join the psalmist in a song of eternal praise.

“Heigh Ho, Heigh Ho .” You may remember the song. The seven dwarfs sing it as they finish work in the diamond mine. What Walt Disney put into a cartoon in 1937 had long been part of various cultures around the world: the work song. Folklorists have studied the way in which music has been associated with work. For example, railroad workers would spend their days laying the rails. To do this, they would take ten-pound hammers, swing them in a full circle, and strike the spike that would hold down the rails and ties. A work song would coordinate the labor.

The rhythm of the song set the pace for swinging. The joining of voices united the workers, and the call and response kept workers engaged.

This morning our text is Psalm 113. Psalm 113 is known as a Praise Psalm. It was one of a set of six psalms that were sung at Passover. As Israel gathered to remember the Passover, they would sing Psalm 113 at the beginning of their celebration. While this is not a work psalm, Israel is not doing any labor as she sings these words. This psalm celebrates God's gracious work how God graciously cares for His people and joins God's people in praise as they serve in his kingdom.

Psalm 113 teaches us to celebrate God's gracious work. One of the intriguing things about work songs is that they join something we often think of as pleasurable—singing—with a difficult and menial task—laying rails for a train. We are accustomed to keeping the joy of singing and the struggle of work separate, but work songs join the two.

In a similar way, our psalm joins together two things that we tend to keep separate. On the one hand, we have the utter greatness of God. As we listen to the opening of the psalm we see the Lord seated on high, enthroned in eternity.

Time passes in our world. Kings and rulers come and go. But the Lord is seated in the heavenly realms, and his rule never began and never ends. It just always is. Not only is the Lord ruling in eternity but his rule also extends over all space. From the east to the west, the Lord is in control. There is no space over which he has no control.

On the other hand, we have the utter nearness of God. This God who is seated above the heavens and the earth is also able to see the smallest thing on earth. He is able to care for the poor and the needy. Those who gather their food from trash heaps are the ones that this Almighty God notices. The people whose lives pass by and leave no mark on the world are the ones that God marks and claims as his own.

The psalmist calls for us to praise the Lord, and indeed we should praise him. Out of his gracious love, the Lord of all things chose to come into this world and to die on the cross. Jesus Christ, who was truly God, became truly man that he might bear the suffering of all sin for you and bring the joy of all salvation to you.

Jesus joins the joy of the song of salvation to the painful burdens that we carry and the suffering that we endure in this world. We are chosen by God. There is no person so small, no sin so hidden that Jesus does not take it upon himself and bring to you the grace of God.

This psalm guides our work in God's kingdom. Work songs strengthen the bonds of community. By offering a rhythm to work, by joining the voices of workers, by lifting the spirits of those who are burdened, work songs forge bonds between workers as they do what they have been called to do.

In a similar way, our psalm invites us to be part of a community of faith. One of the interesting things about this psalm is the way in which one small incident from the Scriptures is incorporated into this yearly song for the Passover celebration. If you were to list some of the more memorable events of Scripture, what would you include? The death and resurrection of Jesus for sure. And if you gave it some thought, however, you might say creation, the fall, Noah and the ark, Abraham and Isaac, Moses and the Red Sea, David and Goliath, or Daniel and the lions' den.

How about Hannah and the gift of her son Samuel. As you think about the major events of Scripture, even though Samuel was a prophet, the story of Hannah might not make the list. Hannah was one of Elkanah's two wives. She was the barren one. Not having children caused her great distress. When she once was in the temple praying to God about this, the priest saw how upset she was and accused her of being drunk.

But Hannah was pouring her heart out before the Lord. And though her husband did not hear her, though the priest did not understand her, the Lord heard and understood and answered her prayer. Upon having her child, Hannah sang a song of praise to God.

One small line from that song is in our psalm today. The Lord ***“raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor”*** (1 Samuel 2:8; cf vs 7–8). From the song of one of the minor characters in Scripture comes a confession of faith in God. God caused this song to be heard in Israel, and Israel began to join in singing this song.

This one small work of God became something that joined God's people together as they saw how he works in the smallest ways to extend his gracious care to his people.

In our readings today, we see how often the church has forgotten this song. In Amos, we overhear God's people singing a song of self-service. They are ignoring the poor and needy. In the Gospel, we hear the religious leaders singing a song of greed. They, too, are ignoring the poor and needy. But the Psalm is given to God's people to change our way of living in the world. Rather than live for ourselves we learn to join our Lord's mission and care for others.

Not only has Christ redeemed us from our sin but he also has joined us together as a people who live in a kingdom where he loves. There are no insignificant members of our community as we bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the love of Christ.

In the Small Catechism, as Luther teaches people to pray in the morning, he encourages them, after finishing their prayers, to ***“go joyfully to your work, singing a hymn, like that of the Ten Command-ments, or whatever your devotion may suggest.”***

In some ways, Psalm 113 is a similar song for service in God's kingdom. The psalm begins by turning our attention to God. We praise him for his rule over all things. But then we begin to see ever more clearly the tenderness of his gracious work. He comes to care for the poor and lowly. As we sing God's praise, we are led by God into service. God's gracious care guides us as we serve in his kingdom.

Amen