

**Matthew 21:12-17** *Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it 'a den of robbers.' "The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, "'From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise'?" And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.*

We're now in week 5 after Easter. Last Sunday was called "**Cantate**": *Sing to the Lord a new song for he has done marvelous things.*<sup>1</sup> He has raised our Lord and saviour from the dead, IX lives and we shall live also. It's not so long ago and we heard Professor Dr Klän preaching on Jesus cleaning out the temple. Well, today's reading from St. Matthew's gospel is somewhat different from that of St. John – or shall I say, we get another perspective on it coming from *Cantate*. Today we focus more on the children's shouting praises: "**Hosanna to the Son of David**" and that's put into contrast by the indignation of the chief priests and teachers of the law. They were not going to give one bit of credit to Jesus, nor sing his praises – now or ever.

## 1. Lauding and praising God is our office<sup>2</sup>:

1.1. Of course in **Jerusalem** and in the **temple** of the living God. That was the place of praise and worship, sacrifice, singing and praying to the Lord.<sup>3</sup> That's the center of the world, it's epicenter and focal point of God's people.

1.1.1. The **Psalms 122**<sup>4</sup> and **Psalms 150**<sup>5</sup> underline this.

1.1.2. The NT takes it for granted and takes on the **spiritual hymns of the OT** congregation like Simeon (*Nunc dimittis*)<sup>6</sup> & Hannah<sup>7</sup>, but also Zacharias: *Benedictus*<sup>8</sup> into its holy repertoire of godly praise and Christian songs.

<sup>1</sup> It is a recurring theme throughout the Bible, especially in the Psalms, but also in the history books and also in the prophets big and small. Nearly every Psalm contains this exhortation: *"Sing to him (the God our Lord), sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works!"* (1Ch 16:9 ESV) and *"Sing to the LORD, all the earth! Tell of his salvation from day to day."* (1Ch 16:23 ESV)

<sup>2</sup> *"Gott loben ist unser Amt!"*

<sup>3</sup> Hear the *"voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank offerings to the house of the LORD: "Give thanks to the LORD of hosts, for the LORD is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!" For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first, says the LORD."* (Jer 33:11 ESV)

<sup>4</sup> *"I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD." Our feet are standing in your gates, Jerusalem. Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together. That is where the tribes go up-- the tribes of the LORD-- to praise the name of the LORD according to the statute given to Israel. There stand the thrones for judgment, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels." For the sake of my family and friends, I will say, "Peace be within you." For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your prosperity."* (Psalm 122:1-9 NIV)

<sup>5</sup> *"Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. ... Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD."* (Psa 150:1+6 NIV)

<sup>6</sup> Lk2:27 *Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts.*

<sup>7</sup> Lk2:37f *She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.*

<sup>8</sup> Lk1:8-10 *Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. And then once he was born he sang the Benedictus: His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his*

1.1.3. You see even **Jesus as 12 year** old sees himself belonging in the temple<sup>9</sup> - that's what Christians even children hear and do too: Go to where the heavenly Father is found to hear his word, sing his praises and pray to him in worship, lament and thanksgiving. So its no surprise that the early congregation of Christians in Jerusalem **gathers daily in the temple**<sup>10</sup>

1.2. However we know that once Christ was risen, the old temple was now derelict and outdated. It had fulfilled its function. The curtain in the temple had torn, when IX died on the cross at Golgotha. He is now the entrance, free way and the means to get to the Father – just as he had told that Samaritan women at the well: There will come a time, when we will worship the living God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit - not on this mountain or on that one, not on Horeb, Sinai, Zion, but **in Spirit and in truth...**

1.2.1. That's what happened in the time of the very early Christians, in the **Pre-Constantinian Era** - when they were not yet officially recognized, when they were still thought of as a Jewish sect or as enemies of the people and the state, they were persecuted - like Stephen<sup>11</sup> - They gathered in catacombs, secret hiding places, monasteries out in desert outcrops, but also in prisons like St. Paul and Silas in Philippi or arenas like the Circus maximus in Rome, where they were burnt live at the stake, mauled by ferocious lions and booed by the blood thirsty mob. There they sang Psalms, hymns and prayers like the Psalms, Litany, the Te deum, Our Father or just short outbursts like the Kyrie or Halleluja or Hosanna like the children here

1.2.2. Later – during emperor Constantine's reign - Christianity became a **religio licita** and even the state religion Churches, it was officially practiced and sanctioned in grand cathedrals and other high and mighty places throughout the ever spreading empires of the world<sup>12</sup>.

1.2.3. Many different kinds and types<sup>13</sup>: Psalms, spiritual songs, hymns and liturgical passages<sup>14</sup> Gospel songs, blues and Jazz too – founded in the slave and liberation movement.<sup>15</sup> Reading about that baptized

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*people and redeemed them. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us-- to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him ,to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."*

<sup>9</sup> Lk2:49 "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

<sup>10</sup> "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles... Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people." (Act 2:41-47 NIV)

<sup>11</sup> Acts 7

<sup>12</sup> Not just huts and kraals, humble homesteads and far off mission stations.

<sup>13</sup> *They sing to the tambourine and the lyre and rejoice to the sound of the pipe. (Job 21:12 ESV)*

<sup>14</sup> *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing **psalms and hymns and spiritual songs**, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Col 3:16 ESV)*

<sup>15</sup> *Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and **the tongue of the mute sing for joy**. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert, the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals,*

Ethiopian going his way joyfully – I can imagine him whistling on his way and humming this or that temple tune or even intoning this or that psalm perhaps even the ones we like most too.<sup>16</sup>

1.2.4. **Mission** of every Christian soul and heart – to sing that praise of the living God even **beyond the boundaries of the church** so that gentiles – pagans – old and new atheists - may hear it and thus praise God also... <sup>17</sup> *And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.* (Col 3:17 ESV) together with **all the needy**: Poor, blind, lame, childless, exile, refugee, hungry...

1.2.5. So at the end all the elect, called and saved from the ends of the world, from all languages, tribes and nations will sing the praises of the lamb with the **song of Moses**.<sup>18</sup> It is too little that just Israel praise God, all the nations – the entire world, mountains & valleys, heaven and earth, stars, moon and planets of all galaxies are to praise the Lord, our God and creator.

2. **Den of robbers:** Yet a great malady is and has been robbing God's honour and glory, taking praise for oneself and even trying to stop others from going about this our very core business of praising God and singing to his honour and glory like those authorities in the temple do – indignant as they were and in their eyes probably rightfully so. Who does the meet, right and salutary worship? Compare the ancient music of Bach (**SDG**) with that of modern Pop!<sup>19</sup> Or Brass band and drums, or dancing and liturgy. What's the litmus test for the song in your church/congregation, your family – your own life or that in public sphere<sup>20</sup>?

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*where they lie down, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.* (Isa 35:4-10 ESV)

<sup>16</sup> Mine are 23, 103 and also the 7 penitential psalms:

Psalm 6: *Domine, ne in furore*; In affliction

Psalm 32: *Beati quorum remissae*; Blessing of forgiveness

Psalm 38: *Domine, ne in furore*; in dire straits

Psalm 51: *Miserere mei, Deus*; God have mercy on me!

Psalm 102: *Domine, exaudi*; Prayer for the restitution of Zion

Psalm 130: *De profundis*; Out of the depths ...

Psalm 143: *Domine, exaudi*; Please spare me and hear my prayer

<sup>17</sup> "... and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, **"Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name."** (Rom 15:9 ESV)

<sup>18</sup> *And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! (Rev 15:3 ESV) and also "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." (Rev 7:9-12 ESV)*

<sup>19</sup> I know that's somewhat unfair, but I don't just mean the quality and style, but rather the focus and goal. Worship of God: Soli deo Gloria on the one hand and plain self-centrism on the other, idolatry and more or less love for oneself.

<sup>20</sup> Memories of walkways, byways: Pomeroy, Lake Victoria and shopping malls and gym today.

2.1. Crucial question for it is determined by right and wrong church from the beginning: Kain & Abel; Izaak & Ishmael; Amazja & Amos<sup>21</sup>; Elijah – Ahab & Jezabel; Hananja and Isaiah; Jeremiah & Pashur<sup>22</sup>; High Priest & Jesus. Stephen and Saul; Luther & Charles V/Pope Leo X;

2.1.1. **Not always as obvious as with murder and terror:** e.g. slaughter of the innocents just after Christmas, but also of the faithful at the altar of the highest cf. churches as targets of terror – not just of the Muslims, but also of the racial, xenophobic attacks and genocide in Rwanda happening in the churches, congregational halls and the progroms in Russia by Orthodox Cossacks or the gassing of the Jews in Germany – just because they were Jews, people of the old temple/synagogue; ongoing abortion of innocent children in secular society and even with consent of pious Christians.

2.1.2. **Sometimes its rather subtle, even delicate and seemingly friendly.** Remember how even the disciples of Jesus tried to stop the children from getting to Jesus? But he said: Let the children come to me and don't hinder, stop and prevent them. For to such as these is the kingdom of God! Truly I say to you, if you don't become like one of them, you'll not enter the kingdom of God. Here it is the high and mighty again trying to stop the children from singing praises and lauding God in the highest: **Hosanna to the Son of David!**

3. **Healing of blind and lame – wonderful things he does!** And from the lips of children and infants he calls forth praise. If we don't, He can make the stones shout for joy, sing praises and give thanks! But we don't want to remain quiet, but join in the singing, thanksgiving and praising of God our Lord – our saviour, creator and eternal helper and source of all goodness. At all life's stations, daily life and highlights too, but also at the grave. With his holy Word and sacrament he shares with us his wonderful gifts, miracles and wonders and we answer with songs of faith and praise. Amen. The Peace of our Lord IX be with you always + **Jubilate** +

Hymn 475

<sup>21</sup> Amos 7:10-17

<sup>22</sup> Jeremiah 20f