

I feel like I have to preface this sermon with the fact that in my mind it is jokingly dedicated to my sister. Jennifer and I have always had this kind of running joke that we both cannot stand the Psalms. Ever since I was a teenager, I can remember us having moments in church where we both were like, oy, the Psalms. And ok, maybe this mostly reveals the depth of our biblical nerdiness that we have had multiple, extensive conversations about the Psalms, but this is who we are and what we do. Yet, a couple of years ago something happened...Jennifer started loving the Psalms. She had taken one of our favorite professor's flagship classes in seminary, that was literally a semester dedicated to learning about the Psalms, and she emerged from that class a new woman. I didn't know what to do with myself. My partner in Psalm hating crime had abandoned me. And now every time we recap how our respective Bible studies have gone for the week, she always tells me how they ended up spending a lot of time on the Psalm and I'm always like, "What? Whhhhy?"

The same thing happened this week. Jenn is on vacation this week and doesn't have to preach, so she said she had trouble drumming up ideas for Bible study, *except*, the Psalm really had a lot there. I said, "Of course it does," with about as much sarcasm as I have in my body, and then I politely listened to her thoughts about it, while also trying to figure out what in the

world I wanted to say this week as we prepare for five straight weeks of Jesus talking about bread. I sat down on Thursday to write, and apparently my best sermon inspiration comes in the middle of airports, because I was stuck staring at a blank screen. And then I remembered my conversation with Jennifer earlier in the week, and I actually said out loud at my desk, though quite begrudgingly, “Jennifer *wanted* me to look at the Psalm...” So I did...and I swear sometimes the Holy Spirit operates with a sledgehammer rather than a tap on the shoulder, because right there, smack dab in the middle of the Psalm was a verse that had wholly changed my faith life.

“The Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts up those who are bowed down.” I read that and in my head it was immediately translated into song, “The Lord upholds...all who are falling...and raises up...all who are bowed down.” I scrambled to open my phone and find what I was looking for, and finally after minutes of searching, I found it. Two tiny little videos from March 2018 when I attended “Why Christian?” A conference literally centered around asking different people to answer that question, why they are a Christian. That conference was transformative for me for a lot of reasons, but one of them was this verse from the Psalms.

I will be wholly and completely honest with you all this morning, because in order for you to understand *why* this verse, it requires

vulnerability. When I was at that conference, my faith life felt like it was at one of lowest points it had ever been at. I was struggling beyond words, and I hadn't really told anyone that, except God. One of the red threads throughout this conference was this one verse. The musicians who were leading us, taught us a rhythm to sing it, and at the beginning of every session, we would sing it, with different tempos, different moods, different instrumentation each time. Sometimes it was upbeat and moved, sometimes it was slow and reflective. At one point, we sang it entirely acoustic, hundreds of voices echoing around this giant sanctuary, and we sang it over and over and over and over again, at least fifty times in a row. Our voices shifting and moving over one another, echoing and restarting again and again. I sat in that sanctuary and sang and cried, because for one of the first times, I *felt* the Psalms. The Lord upholds...all who are falling...and raises up...all who are bowed down. I felt like that verse had been written for me. I felt like I was falling, like I was bowed down, and yet here came this echoing promise...the Lord upholds, the Lord raises up. The Lord doesn't let us fall, even when we feel like we can't stop our momentum.

I called Jennifer and I told her the thing I never thought would happen was happening, and it took her a hot second, but she finally caught on. "You're preaching on the Psalm!" I still couldn't resist the eye roll, but I

said, yes I was because when the Holy Spirit nudges, or sledgehammers, you have to listen. So, she then reinforced to me her Psalm thoughts, pay attention to the “alls!” Think about what this Psalm means! And well...here we are...the sermon I never planned on giving.

So here's what you need to know about Psalm 145. For our Jewish siblings, it is the *ultimate* form of praise. The entire thing is actually recited three times a day in Jewish culture, as a form of prayer, as a form of praise. It's actually the *only* Psalm in the Hebrew Bible that identifies itself as a psalm, as a hymn of praise. It was written exclusively and primarily for the purpose of giving praise and thanks to God for the wonders God has wrought in the world. It's a reminder that everything on earth, everything we see, touch, experience is meant to give praise to God. And to truly drive home the all-encompassing nature of the message, look at our text for today. Look at how many times the word “all” is used in just nine short verses. 11 times!!! 11 times the word all is used.

All your works shall praise you, O Lord. That *all* people may know of your power. Your dominion endures throughout *all* ages. You, Lord, are faithful in *all* your words, and loving in *all* your works. The Lord upholds *all* those who fall. The eyes of *all* wait upon you, O Lord. You are righteous in *all* your ways and loving in *all* your works. You are near to *all*

who call upon you, to *all* who call upon your faithfully. Every single fiber of our being, every single tiny part of creation is meant to give praise to God, and in return, God gives us all of Godself. God is always faithful, always loving, always righteous, always near. Our life with God is meant to be this beautiful two-way street of *all*, we give our all to God, all our hope, all our praise, all our faith, and God gives us all God's got, all God's love, strength, power, and grace. *All*. God gives *all* for us. And in return we give all of our praise.

But here's where I kept getting stuck. The moment in my life when this Psalm struck me the most was about the least praiseful I have ever felt. I wasn't in a place to want to give thanks to God. And so I was like, well, what on earth is this Psalm trying to say to me then? And then it hit. Even when we aren't at our best, even when we aren't at our most "all." God never stops giving us God's all. God seeps into those moments and infuses them with all God has. When we are falling, God steps in with all God has and lifts us up, sometimes in ways we never could have ever anticipated. That's what struck me as I sat at my desk re-listening to my videos. Even when we don't have it together, God does. And the beauty of the fact that even in the midst of this Psalm which is supposed to be all about praising God, the writers take a moment to acknowledge that we're all going to get it

wrong at some point, we're not going to be feeling it. So even in the midst of our praise, we take a moment to say, thank God, God can handle *all* of this, and we're never going to be alone.

Maybe all of this is a really convoluted way of simply saying this: we *all* are going to have moments when we feel like we are falling, like we can't keep ourselves together, like we don't know which way to turn, like everything is crumbling in our hands. Maybe you're having one of those moments today, where you aren't sure where to turn or how your life is going to play out, where you aren't sure who you are or what any of this means. Maybe you're feeling about as far away from wanting to praise God as you've ever felt. And into those moments comes a really tiny promise, the Lord upholds *all* who are falling and raises up *all* who are bowed down. I think sometimes we feel like we're too insignificant to be noticed by God, like our stuff isn't as important as other peoples, like our feelings and emotions are nothing compared to what other people have going on, and so we worry that God is going to let us slip through the cracks. Yet, this Psalm promises that God upholds everyone, every single person that feels bowed down and burdened by the weight of the world, by the weight of their own heart, by the weight of their worries. God is there for each and every one of us, for all of us, no matter what, for always.

At the end of Why Christian that year, the closing hymn was “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing.” It’s a hymn that I’ve always liked but it’s never really *done* anything for me, until then. I remember leaving my pew singing, “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the God I love. Here’s my heart, oh, take and seal it; seal it for thy courts above.” And once again, tears poured down my cheeks, but this time it was out of *relief*. I had felt like I was falling, like I was bowed down, like I was wandering, and God found me, God caught me. It was like God tucked a finger under my chin, and raised my eyes up from the ground to say, “Hey...you’ve got this, because I’ve got you.”

Sometimes these are the simplest reminders we need. You don’t always have to get God, get faith, have it all together. You don’t even have to really *feel* it all of the time. Because God does. God gets us, our hearts, our faith, our wanderings, our journeys. God takes the broken pieces of us and puts them back together in the world’s most beautiful jigsaw puzzle. God feels us *all* of the time. When we’re lost, when we’re lonely, when we’re exuberant, when we’re calm. For all time, God has us together. For always, God has us together. When we are falling, God will uphold us, always. When we are bowed down, God will raise us up. And in that one promise, there is something worth praising three times a day. **AMEN!!!**