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<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens...

<sup>7</sup> Praise the LORD from the earth...

<sup>11</sup> Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth!

<sup>12</sup> Young men and women alike, old and young together!

<sup>13</sup> Let them praise the name of the LORD...

From Psalm 148 (NRSV)

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Well... Christmas is over, and how do you feel? Are you feeling a little 'hung-over' from an over-indulgence in food or drink or celebrating? Is there a sense of 'feeling blue' as you have to say good-bye to family and loved ones again? Is there a feeling of 'let-down', or perhaps a sense of 'relief that it's all over'? How has this Christmas affected you? Sometimes, after important events, we can have a feeling of 'let-down', or 'being blue' as we prepare to return to the day-to-day concerns of life. And some times, the real challenge for us, is to remain 'in tune' with the true reason for the season. However, as Christians, we may say we have an advantage in celebrating at this time as we know the twelve days of Christmas has just begun (on 25<sup>th</sup> Dec), and 'Christmas is not over', as other may think. Instead, we may still be 'in tune' with this season.

A preacher tells this story: a sheep farmer (a long time ago) once lived in an isolated place, and in his isolation he was an avid listener to the radio. He also loved playing the violin, but it was out of tune. However, he had no tuning fork and was unable to get it right. So he wrote to the station about his problem, and he asked that at a certain hour and a certain minute that they would strike the right note for him. And they did. They stopped everything else. They silenced everything else, and they struck that note. And in that distant shepherd's hut he was able to put his instrument into tune again.

Psalm 148 is a Psalm that speaks about us being 'in tune with God. Psalm 148 begins with the phrase, "Praise the LORD!" It also ends on this same high note of joy and worship: "Praise the LORD!" In the Hebrew, the word is *hallel*, from which comes our English words Hallelujah and alleluia. In the days of ancient Israel the phrase "Praise the LORD!" is an invitation to people to come and worship God. Later, in the history of Israel, *Hallelujah* (that is, "Praise the LORD') becomes a victory cry to God for saving them. And the early Christian church used these Hebrew words in their liturgies for similar reasons. For example, in Revelation 19:1-8, the heavenly multitude along with God's faithful offer their loud cries, praising God for God's victory over the powers of evil.

This psalm is instructive for us as we continue to celebrate the season of Christmas. This Psalm has the structure of: a beginning call to praise (v.1a: "Praise the Lord'); the 'heaven's then are called to praise God (vv.1b-6); all the earth then is called to praise God (vv.7-13b); and this culminates in a call for all people to praise God; and the conclusion (vv.13c-14) reminds us of God's greatness in creation, and His greatness is salvation, and His greatness in His constant presence in our lives.

If we look carefully at this psalm we see the various “orders of creation” praising God. And how do they do this..? We praise God by being and doing what God created us to be and do. We ‘praise God’ not simply with words, by being what God has called us to be... That’s why we gather in worship again – to ‘get into tune with God’. We need to ‘listen for the right note’ (the ‘right word’), so we can keep our hearts in tune. But sometimes our lives seem to ‘get out of tune’; don’t they...?

Our lives may ‘get out of tune’ when we ‘worship the creation’ in such a way that we forget about the Creator-God. Our lives can ‘get out of tune’ when we become so concerned for ourselves (‘concerned’ that ‘we feel loved’, or ‘feel appreciated’ or ‘feel wanted’, or whatever it may be) that we actually forget to properly love, appreciate, and want others. Our lives can ‘get out of tune’ when we forget the real great gift of life God has given us through Jesus, His only Son, our Lord.

On this First Weekend after Christmas we may recall the story of Jesus’ family travelling to Jerusalem for the great Festival of the Passover. At the end of their celebration they began their journey home, only to discover Jesus was not with them. Upon their return to Jerusalem they found Jesus, who replied, “Didn’t you know I had to be in My Father’s house?” Here is a life that seeks to be ‘in tune with the Father’s love for us’...

However, now that Christmas is over, we are often tempted to set our spiritual lives on cruise control until Easter. But the Apostle Paul insists that we ought to continue to prepare for this, not just wait for this. He spells out just how (Col.3:12-13,15): "Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.... Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other.... And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. And be thankful". The last three words alone are enough homework to last us until Easter and beyond.

It’s time to give praise to God, our Father and Creator. It’s always time to seek to ‘be in tune’ with God. Praise God for His creation. He has created you. He blessed you with the talent and creativity that you have. He has taken care of you, redeemed you, set you apart as his, and secured your eternity. Give to Him praise.

It’s time to give praise to God, our Redeemer, our and Saviour. We are called to worship as Jesus did, and we can re-commit ourselves to worship in 2019, and seek to encourage others in a life of praise (and therefore a life of joy). Luke portrays Jesus in this way. Jesus finds safety and comfort in the temple. After being missing for three days, Jesus responds to his parents, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49).

And this life of praise – that has at its heart a desire to be in the Father’s house – will also take place outside of a church building. The Spirit of God is present throughout all creation (Gen.1:1). Look at where the Psalmist was when he instructed us to praise the Lord. The implication is that we praise and live for Him everywhere! And this is about real and practical ways that comes from a heart that is in tune with God’s Word and will for us all.

St Paul has said, “Bear with each other”. And so, we may praise God by seeking to nurture those who ‘feel lost in life’ (even our sister or brother in Christ) by seeking to be ‘clothed with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience’. Jesus was born as a human being in this world to heal and save the world. His love embraces all creation. Thus, as followers of Jesus, and as children of God, we seek to give God praise in a way that honours all His creation – including one another. People who seek to praise God in a building will seek to praise Him in the world; and those who claim to praise God in the world will have a heart for the Father’s house.

When we see the Bible’s account of our origins, we see that behind everything there is a loving God who spoke everything into existence. Furthermore, He is a Person who can be known. Our life of praise comes from knowing Christ Jesus as Saviour, in spite of the circumstances of this life. Our life is Jesus. He is our God who comes to us in the Father’s house in Word and Sacrament this day. What a wonderful gift we have as God’s family in being able to come together in worship – even for those who are aged who cannot physically come into this building, but whose hearts are in this place where Jesus visits us... where our God in Christ Jesus visits us in Word and Sacrament. Here is the Father’s house for you...

Sometimes people can ‘feel a little blue’ at Christmas, either because of family problems or because they miss some family. As we remember that we are also part of a greater family – God’s family through Christ our Saviour – we know a presence and a love that is always with us. All people from all sorts of families – from kings and princes to the most lowly, from the youngest to the oldest – have worshipped God in Christ; and in doing so they have found great purpose, peace, and joy in life. Even if we may ‘blue’ at times, there is a deep and abiding joy that comes from hearts that seek to be ‘in tune’ with God. Praise the Lord! Amen.