

God is enthroned with enthusiasm (Psalm 47)

Many religious services sit squarely at the sober end of the spectrum. Psalms of the praise type would beg to disagree.

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May 16, 2023

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My spouse was in a job search a few years ago. She was one of three finalists for the position of rector at a moderate-size parish.

Her experiences as a rector, diocesan committee chair and member, mentor of seminarians, and more commended her for the position. It was no surprise that the search committee was favorable to her and invited her to preside and preach at a Sunday service so the whole congregation could get a sense of her style.

She thought the morning had gone very well. She had felt comfortable in the space and with the people; many of them had spoken with her after the service, thanking her for being with them and noting that they appreciated her presence at the altar as well as the manner and message and ease of her sermon style. Some had even spoken of a future shared ministry.

She did not get the call. She asked for feedback, especially since she had thought the interviews and the service had been so successful. The response: she had too much energy. Her enthusiasm had apparently scared some members.

Ironically, enthusiasm, according to my handy etymological dictionary, is derived from the Greek *en* + *theos* which, roughly translated, means, “God’s gotten into you.”

Many, though obviously not all, religious services of any faith sit squarely at the sober end of the spectrum. Enthusiasm in such services need not apply. Psalms of the praise type would beg to disagree. Psalm 47, for instance, opens with “Clap your hands”—in the imperative mood, no less—followed by “loud songs of joy” and even “God going up with a shout,” not to mention those trumpets.

Psalm 47 is an enthronement psalm. For a time in Israel’s history, gods of other nations were a necessary given and often a stumbling block. The God Israel worshiped, the God of Abraham’s family, the God Moses had met on Sinai/Horeb, was, early on, considered the national deity of Israel only, greater of course than alien gods, a God among gods. Eventually, the people of God/Israel recognized that the God of Israel was in fact *the* God, the only God, and therefore the God of all the nations whether they approved or not: “The princes of the peoples [= foreigners] gather as the *People of the God of Abraham*.” Psalm 47 is one of the songs of praise that celebrates that fact and the enthronement of that God with enthusiasm.

It’s something of a puzzle, lo these thousands of years later, that folks still don’t seem to get it. “God’s on our side” as opposed to that of our enemies, no matter who they are. And they often return the favor.

The Israelites finally got it and got with the program. But some of the prophets—and later, Jesus—had to re-teach that truth. As have others since then. Our own Abraham Lincoln, not a churchy type himself, tried to teach it to a divided country a couple millennia later. Still, we persist. Will another psalmist or Honest Abe need to return to prod us out of this chauvinism? Will Jesus?