

Psalm 99:1-9**The Lord reigns**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

When Jesus stood before Peter, John, and James, on the mountain and was transfigured before them, the very glory of God was on display. This same glory was reflected in the face of Moses after meeting with God at Mt Sinai. On both occasions, the presence of God's glory in such a dramatic way was a visible reminder of God's holiness. In the case of Moses, this was God's guarantee to the people that Moses was speaking God's own words. The holy God had something to say to his people. In the case of Jesus, this was God showing the world that Jesus was the incarnate Son. The holy God didn't just have something to say to his people but was now dwelling among his people.

Moses being able to enter directly into the presence of a holy God was already something amazing. But now on the mount of transfiguration, everyone has the ability to enter the presence of a holy God, because that holy God has entered into our presence. For God to be holy, it means that God is entirely without equal, entirely distinct and separate from anything in creation. The normal response to anything in creation being confronted with God's holiness and glory is what we see in the psalm for today. The nations tremble. The whole earth quakes. Everyone is called to bow down before God because he is holy.

To call God 'holy' is to acknowledge that God is radically different from anything in the universe that exists or that we could imagine. To say that God is holy is to stress the otherness or separateness of God. And yet, in the praises of Psalm 99, this transcendent and unapproachable God sits in majesty in Jerusalem, enthroned between the cherubim. This is certainly a reference to the temple in Jerusalem and the ark of the covenant that God instructed his people to make. He becomes accessible and approachable by his people, through Moses and Aaron and Samuel, all the priests between and since.

As Psalm 99 unfolds, it becomes increasingly clear that the holy God is actually invested not only in a particular place but in humanity as a whole. We are reminded that this holy and mighty God was present with his people in the Exodus, speaking to them from the pillar of cloud. And this happened even as the people grumbled against God. The Lord God, though holy and almighty, has not cut off contact with humans but is active among them.

The prophet Hosea says it like this, "I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst." The gospel writer John says it a little different, "The Word became flesh and lived among us." The point is that God remains King over all creation, but, though powerful and mighty, chose to involve himself in creation. He is described as a lover of justice, one who established fairness, and acts with justice and righteousness. Note that justice and righteousness and fairness are all relational words. God is holy and all-powerful and chooses to invest in his creation. God enters into forgiving relationships based on steadfast love

Yet, God's forgiving love is also accompanied by divine judgment. The holiness of God cannot be marred, but God achieves this not by staying remote from creation but by providing creation with the means to exist in the presence of a holy God. And the somewhat mysterious events of the transfiguration provide assurance that Jesus is indeed the very presence of this holy God, and the very means by which creation can exist in the presence of a holy God.

Where this leaves all leave us is with the knowledge that God is still the almighty king over all things. Even though creation may be in turmoil, even though the earth quakes and the nations tremble, even though God's people may reject his will and turn to idols, God is still holy and still seeking justice and fairness and righteousness. Even if we cannot see God's holiness right now, he doesn't stop being holy, he doesn't stop being king of creation. And many things are going on in this world that are severely lacking in justice and fairness and righteousness, and could blind us to God's holiness. Whether it's war or flooding or a pandemic, or one of the many other less televised troubles that people face, God still seeks justice for his world. Wherever we have contributed to the hurt of others, God still comes to us with forgiveness and restoration.

This is simply who our God is. He is holy, he is like no other, he is merciful and just and willing to pay the price for our sin. Again and again, the psalm calls us to praise and exalt the Lord God. And so we should. God is most certainly worthy of our praise. He is holy and righteous in every way and deserving of our worship. He is the Lord Almighty, the king of creation, and it is good for us to be here in his presence to receive his gifts of grace and forgiveness. Thanks be to God. Amen.

May God's peace, which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus. Amen.