

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

2 Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.

3 Know that the Lord is God.
It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise.
Give thanks to him, bless his name.

5 For the Lord is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.

This is the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God.**

FIRST READING: If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, 2 make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

6 who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,

7 but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

8 he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

9 Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,

10 so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

This is the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God.**

“ENTER WITH PRAISE”

*“Praise is the duty and delight, the ultimate vocation of the human community... We have a resilient hunger to move beyond self, to return our energy and worth [in gratitude] to the One from whom it has been granted. In our return to that one, we find our deepest joy.”*¹ (Walter Bruggemann).

Well, that about says it all. Praising, worshipping the One to whom we belong, body and soul, in life and in death...that is why we exist and what we joyfully exist for. The psalmist, the writer of Psalm 100, certainly understood this. In his writing, 1000 BC, he provides testimony that praise is what is at the heart of our religion. In five very simple verses, he invites, he implores, the community to participate in a high liturgical activity, namely, singing in a grand parade, through the gates of the city...the gates which were, in his time, built for ceremonial and defensive purposes, and which represented the difference between being outside and being inside, being vulnerable and secure, being away and being home.² The psalmist implores the community to enter through these gates and into the courts where God dwells. He implores them to enter into the very presence of the Almighty and to there, worship and praise their LORD.

The psalmist calls upon God’s people to worship and praise but to very specifically thank God for 1. God’s loving kindness and the deeply profound reality that this loving kindness is everlasting. In Hebrew it’s broadly known as *Hesed*. God has bound us up in a covenant love that will never be revoked or abandoned. *Hesed*. And there is nothing that we’ve done or can do that can change it. It is truly everlasting love. The psalmist calls upon the people to thank God for 2. the profound reality that God is dependable. *“God’s faithfulness is to all generations.”* His truth endures. Only God remains forever. And the psalmist calls upon them to thank God for 3. God’s goodness. This goodness is not based on what God does, but on who God is, on God’s character, on God’s love, on our knowledge that God is God.³

¹ Walter Brueggemann. *“Israel’s Praise”*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; 1988), 1-2.

² Anon. *The Great Gates of Praise*. https://www.homileticonline.com/subscriber/btl_display.asp?installment_id=93040856 (accessed 1/24/20).

³ Keith Krell. *“It’s All About Who You Know” (Ps 100:1-5)*

Christians frequently still sing a hymn based on the 100th psalm, the “Old Hundredth.” It is the oldest English hymn, and it has Presbyterian beginnings. The tune, which is the tune of the Doxology, with which we dedicate our offering every Sunday, was written in 1551 by Louis Bourgeois, John Calvin’s organist in Geneva. And the words are a Scottish paraphrase of Ps 100 written by a friend of John Knox in 1561.⁴ The original paraphrase includes: “*All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice...Know that the Lord is God indeed; without our aid he did us make.*”

Yes, in this psalm the psalmist calls people to thank God for God’s *hesed*, for God’s faithfulness and for God’s goodness, but foundational to all of it is that part about “*without our aid he did us make*”. The psalmist calls people to enter the courts with praise, above all else because God is our Creator and we belong to God! We are God’s people, the sheep of God’s pasture! All our gratitude, all else follows from this understanding. To praise God, individually or corporately, requires us to then get out of ourselves...to leave the constant pressure to focus on our needs, whether self-imposed or imposed by the world, and to instead focus on the One who is greater than it all. We are called from our health concerns, our family responsibilities, our jobs, our financial woes, our relationships... and into the presence of the living God,... “*into his courts with praise*”.⁵ Yes, true worship insists that we focus not on ourselves, except that we belong, body and soul, in life and death, to the One who we are ready to encounter, the mysterious and majestic living God.

This understanding brings us to ask ourselves a couple of questions:

1. Are we ready when we encounter the presence of God to give of ourselves, or are we yet looking to receive? Do we turn the act of worshipping to be about ourselves too? Are we here sometimes more to have fellowship, to be edified, to be entertained, to find rest or sanctuary? Some of these are good reasons, but they can’t be the primary ones... *I recall, in a previous church, that when there was conflict in the congregation over what type music was being sung/played in the services, that is, before the church determined to have both a contemporary*

⁴ John Buchanan. “*Saying Grace.*” <https://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2008/112308.html> (accessed 1/24/20).

⁵ John Buchanan. “*Saying Grace.*”

and a traditional service, the Pastor and the Music Director came to the conclusion that the people who were warring needed to remember that worship is our gift to God, not our time to receive what pleases us most. It is about glorifying the Lord with our heartfelt and humble offerings. It's about God, not us. In fact, if people could all want the kind of music that would be most pleasing for our neighbor, others of God's flock, then that would be a way that we'd be really glorifying God. What a great gift THAT would be to our Lord. I thought that to be good insight they had.

We also might ask ourselves this question:

2. Are we coming to worship with apathy or eager anticipation? Do we come out of some sense of obligation or are we coming with joyful hearts? Rev. Donna Schaper has said, *"Joy is simply grace realized. THAT'S WONDERFUL. "Joy is simply grace realized. Grace, defined as an unearned gift, when realized, brings us JOY!"*. When we come, open to encountering our God, the gracious giver of all that we have, unearned as it is, we find deep joy, that results in a praise that we cannot but help offer. I love Karl Barth's quote: *"What else can we say to what God gives us but to stammer praise?"*⁶

Not long ago, when I returned to Grace Presbyterian Church, Temple for a visit, a young woman named Laura, probably in her early twenties, who had been in grade school when I had directed one of the many Christmas Pageants there, approached me. She gave me a hug and told me a funny story but also a pretty touching testimony. She had evidently played the part of an angel one particular year. Laura told me that she remembered that I had given permission to all the girls playing angels that they could wave their arms up and down if they wanted, as though they were flying when they moved from one place to another. She told me that she did just that! She took her role very seriously and in fact, practiced flying at home before the big day. She flew everywhere she went. Certainly, I don't remember any of this. But she told me that she was a great flying angel. And she said that when, on the day of the Pageant, when she was dancing and singing for Baby Jesus, for the gift that God gave

⁶ Karl Barth. *Church Dogmatics* ,III/3. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960, 564.

humanity, she felt like she really was nearly flying. We both laughed outloud when she told me this. But then she said seriously with such a lilt in her voice, that in that worship service, she, as a young girl, had felt closer to God than she ever had before. The grace realized, as she recalled herself praising the Lord, was just palpable. It was joy.

Brothers and sisters, “*Praise is not only a human requirement and human need, it is also a human delight.*”⁷ Our best and highest and most authentically human act is thanking and praising God. So, whatever your particular circumstance is today...whether you’re worried about your health or your job, or your bank account, or your children, or you spouse, or your job, or whether you’re grieving a great loss or are simply overwhelmed with responsibilities, step out of all of it, and as often you can in the upcoming week, and the weeks after that, come home, come inside, come where it’s safe and give yourself over to encountering the One who is present here, the One who dwells here, (*point to heart*) who is good, faithful, and whose love is everlasting, and to whom you belong, in life and death, body and soul.

Come into his presence with singing. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and enter his courts with praise. Amen & Amen.

⁷ Walter Brueggemann. “*Israel’s Praise*” (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; 1988), 1-2.