

“Thank God! Worship God!”

Psalm 100

This has to be one of my favorite Psalms. Partly because it gives me permission to sing at the top of my lungs, no matter how bad my singing may be and partly because it's very words just put me in a really good mood. “Make a joyful noise! Worship the Lord with Gladness!” Doesn't that just make you feel good? How can our hearts not leap for joy at such an invitation?

All in all, this psalm reminds us that our God is good all the time and all the time, our God is good! It calls us to give thanks to our God, to worship our God because God's steadfastness endures forever, that God's faithfulness is to all generations. Rejoice! Celebrate! Enter God's house with thanksgiving!

I'll be honest, even as I read these words this past week, I felt a strange sort of dichotomy between this text and church worship services in general. For some reason, I just couldn't put the two together.

Now don't get me wrong. I'm a sucker for the oldies but goodies just like any other person but as I read this text, I couldn't help but think, Man, this guy, this Psalmist knows why he worships God each week, why he worships God each day. As a person of faith, can I say the same thing? Do I really know why I worship God each week? Do I know why I come to the house of the Lord each Sunday?

Sure, it's my job but is that all there is? Unfortunately, in my line of work, forgetting why we worship is a hazard of the job. Time and time again, I have heard ministers share how much they miss just worshipping on Sunday mornings, simply because they are too worried about what is coming up in the service.

I've done it. On Sunday mornings, my mind is filled with crazy things like: "Is a bat going to come swooping in and land on the communion table? Am I going to trip on my way to the communion table? Are the artificial flowers going to catch fire?" And these are just to name a few. I could probably come up with a list to share with you but I don't want you to start thinking your minister is crazy, if you are not already!

Like I said, this way of thinking, getting distracted in worship, not focusing in church are just hazards of my job. I knew this when I accepted my calling but that doesn't mean that I don't miss the joy of just being able to worship on Sunday mornings. So all week, as I have pondered my worries about this upcoming Sunday's morning worship, I have also struggled to answer the question, "Just exactly why do I come to worship on Sundays?"

And since I'm asking myself this question, I only thought it was fair to ask you the same question. Have you ever really asked yourself why you come to worship on Sunday mornings? And if not, why? Are we afraid of the answer that we might discover?

Are we afraid that the answer to that question may simply be, “I’m here because I’ve always come here or I’m here because I don’t know what else to do on a Sunday morning or I’ve been coming here so long that it has become a habit.” Why do we come to worship on Sunday mornings?

Now I know that I am traveling into dangerous territory as a preacher when I ask this question. I should probably just shut up and be thankful that everyone is here on a Sunday morning; sitting in our pews, singing the songs, saying the prayers.

But once again, the hazards of my job come into play. Preachers sometimes don’t know when to stop talking...but...shouldn’t worship be more than just us sitting in our pews, moving through the motions, week after week? And if it is supposed to be more, than what does that more look like? What does, as the psalmist shares, what does joyful, thankfulness worship really look like?

I’m not sure that I have the answer to that specific question but I do know what it doesn’t look like: Boring! Joyful, Thankful worship is exciting and passion filled. It stirs our hearts and gets our feet to tapping! It revives us and gets us making a joyful noise to the Lord!

Now before we go much farther, please don’t hear me say that I’m changing the worship style nor am I saying that I am redecorating the sanctuary with strobe lights and a disco ball.

What I am saying is that our challenge as people of faith is somehow to reclaim our excitement, reclaim our joy in knowing that we are God's. Somehow, in some shape or fashion, we as people of faith need to reclaim our thankfulness, our over the top, wondrous spirit as we celebrate that God made us! Somehow, we need to start celebrating again the fact that God redeemed us, that God provides for us. Somehow, as one theologian put it, we, as Christians, need to start being an alleluia from head to foot!

Think about it! God has made us! God has redeemed us! God has provided for us! We should be celebrating! We should be singing out loud, no matter how bad it may be! We should be dancing in the aisles! The Lord is God. We are his and it is he who made us! How great is that! If that doesn't make you happy, I don't know what will! Let's celebrate. Let's make a joyful noise. But for some reason, we hold back our excitement. We hold back our joy. And unfortunately, it is not just us as people of faith who are asking, why come to church in the first place. In fact, more and more people are asking that question. And more and more people are starting to wonder the same thing. All because there is no joy in our worship.

That's why I continued to struggle with this strange dichotomy of combining the joy and excitement of Psalm 100 with church worship services in general. I wanted to know what joyful thankfulness worship really looks like for us as people

of faith. And I came to a realization. Somewhere along the way we started worshipping God the wrong way. When I say this, I'm not talking about which different worship style is better, whether traditional or contemporary, whether we like organ or guitar better. What I'm talking about is that somewhere along the way, we as people of faith, forgot why we worship God in the first place.

We come to worship each Sunday, thinking that just an hour a week, will strengthen our faith in God. We have bought into the illusion that one hour a week on Sunday mornings will satisfy our hunger for a deep relationship with God.

But the sad fact is we are wrong. It doesn't. Being in worship on Sunday mornings is not designed to answer all our questions about God, nor is it designed to satisfy our search for God. Worshipping on Sunday mornings is also not just meant to make us feel better about ourselves so that come Monday morning, we can go back to our same old same old routine.

That's not worship or at least not the joyful thankfulness worship that the psalmist is describing. The psalm calls us to enter God's house with thanksgiving. It calls us to praise God for all that God has done and continues to do for us as God's very own people. It calls us to celebrate God. It invites us to enjoy our relationship with God to the fullest.

The thing we have realize is that as we reclaim our joy and excitement as the people of God, we also need to realize that worship, true worship whets our

appetite for God. Worship is designed to give us a sample of the goodness of God and leave us wanting more. And unfortunately, that wanting more won't be satisfied by just being in church on Sunday mornings nor will it be satisfied simply because the preacher preached a good sermon that day.

As people of faith, when it comes to Worship, joy filled thankfulness worship, we need to think beyond just being here during the eleven o'clock hour on Sunday morning. We need to move beyond the expectation that the church will do all the hard work for us when it comes to our relationship with God.

I'm going to tell you, a little secret. No matter how good the preacher is, no matter how good the music is, and more importantly, no matter how good the communion bread is, once we leave these four walls, it is up to us as people of faith to continue the journey, to continue growing in our faith, to continue deepening our relationship with God through prayer, through Bible study, through conversations, through service. No one can do this hard work for us. It is part of our vocation as children of God. It is part of the journey. It is part of the joy we get to experience by being in a relationship with God. We short change ourselves if we only rely on someone else to tell us how and when to experience God.

As we start to rethink why we are here for worship, and as we start to reclaim our joy, reclaim our excitement as one of God's very own, we need to realize that there is something more that the Psalmist gets that we have forgotten.

The psalmist understands that to know God is more than just an exercise in mental activity. It is more than knowing the stories. It is more than knowing the right words. It is more than sitting in our pews on Sunday mornings.

The psalmist understands that to know God is to be active in our relationship with God. We are called to actively internalize our joy and excitement at being claimed and named as God's very own that it seeps and soaks into every cell of our body and we just radiate the goodness of God. We just shine with the grace of God.

The psalmist understands that to know God is to actively experience the presence of God in our lives because here is the best part and something we seem to have forgotten along the way. An experience of the presence of God in our lives can heal a broken heart, can comfort a weary soul, can empower an exhausted spirit. An experience of the presence of God will fill our lives with true, uninhibited, cup runneth over JOY!! How great is that!

That's what the psalmist celebrates when he is worshipping God. He knows joy. He knows excitement. He knows passion. He is experiencing the grace of God and he doesn't care how foolish he looks, dancing around, celebrating his God. He is making a joyful noise to his God and he doesn't care if it only sounds like really bad karaoke. He is joyful. He is excited. He is actively enjoying the presence of

God in his life and he doesn't care what others think or say about him. He is joyful. He is thankful. He is celebrating like there is no tomorrow!

All because he is actively experiencing the presence of God in his life. All because he knows that he is loved more than he could ever imagine. All because he knows his God, here in his heart, not just with his head. He knows his God beyond what people have told him to believe. He knows his God beyond the stories he has read. He knows his God because he is actively serving his God, heart, mind and soul.

And we are invited to do the same. We are invited to realize that the Lord is God. We are invited to celebrate God's steadfast love. We are invited to rejoice in God's faithfulness to all generations. We are to celebrate that our God is good all the time and all the time God is good.

We are invited to make a joyful noise to the Lord, no matter how bad our singing may be. We are God's, made in the image of God, and loved more than we could ever imagine.

That is why we worship our God each week. We want to deepen our relationship with God. We want to revive our souls. We worship God each week because somewhere along our journeys of faith, we came to realization that to know God is to serve God with all of hearts, with all of our minds, and with all of our souls. We worship God because we know that there is something more than

what this world can offer. We worship God because here we get a sample of the goodness of God and we want more. We worship God because thankfully and joyfully, we are just one big alleluia from the tips of our heads down to the soles of our toe tapping feet.

God made us. God redeemed us. God provides for us. So we celebrate and give praise. We enter God's house with thanksgiving. And once there, we discover what joyful, thankfulness worship really looks like and we rejoice that we are invited to participate in it as God's very own beloved children.

May we always actively strive to experience the presence of God in our lives and may we always make a joyful noise to the Lord, no matter how bad our singing maybe. Because To God's ears, it just sounds like praise and thanksgiving. Amen.