

Present and Thankful

Psalm 100, Colossians 3:12-15

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

Worship the Lord with gladness; come into God's presence with singing.

Know that the Lord is God. It is God that made us, and we are God's;

we are her people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and courts with praise.

Give thanks to God.

For the Lord is good; God's steadfast love endures forever, and

this faithfulness to all generations.

Psalm 100 NRSV

As God's holy and beloved ones, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as God has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body.

And be thankful.

Colossians 3:12-15

Make a joyful noise to God! Enter God's gates with thanksgiving! Psalm 100 is one of my favorites.

The Book of Psalms is a large collection of poetry, written over hundreds of years. The Hebrew word for Psalm is "mizmor", which means "something sung". It's a word that implies singing in praise, maybe with an instrument.

In the Hebrew Bible, the collection of psalms has a different name than we give it, however. It's the "Tehilim," which means "praises". Whether you sing them, or read them, the emphasis, is on the act of praising. In most cases, even the psalms of lament have an element of praise involved in them.

As scholar Robert Alter writes, "...the psalmists tell us that (our) man's ultimate calling is to use the resources of human language to celebrate God's greatness and to express gratitude for (God's) His beneficent acts. This theme is sometimes given special urgency by being joined with an emphasis on the ephemerality of human life. Only the living can praise God." (page xx, *Introduction to The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary*)

Today's psalm is a Thanksgiving Psalm—make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

It's not a long poem. In it's few short verses, it reminds, though, of some important things.

All the earth is called to praise. Which means you and me and other human types. It also means ALL the earth—the trees of the forests, the birds in the air, the fish in the sea —we are all called to praise God.

The earth is called to praise because praise is a job description of those God has created. That's all of us. We, along with the rest of the earth, are a part of God's creation.

The NRSV translates it as
"Know that the Lord is God.
It is he that made us, and we are his;"

Included in that verse is the sense of "God made us. We did not make God." We are God's creation. God's people. The flock God tends.

This may seem obvious, something that shouldn't need to be said. Often, though, we forget we are created, that we are a part of a larger creation, a larger cosmos, all made in love. We act as if we created our own selves by our own proverbial bootstraps and are fully in control over everything we survey....Until, of course, we recognize we aren't in control.

Why are we called to praise God?

We don't praise God because God is an egomaniac who wants the divine creation to focus all attention on God. We praise God because it is the way we are oriented to God and to the world.

John Calvin, one of the leaders of the Reformation and one of the founders of the Presbyterian Church wrote in his Commentary on the Psalms: (volume 5)

"The whole world is a theatre for the display of the divine goodness, wisdom, justice, and power, but the Church is the orchestra, as it were—the most conspicuous part of it; and the nearer the approaches are that God makes to us, the more intimate and condescending the communication of his benefits, the more attentively are we called to consider them."

In her sermon on gratitude and the Psalms, Rev. Marci Glass invites us to consider this imagery. Using Calvin's imagery, all of creation is a stage to display God's goodness, so our very existence is sign of God's goodness and our praise is our work in the orchestra at the theater. (1)

Anyone who has been a part of an orchestra, band, or voice choir or handbell choir, knows what a great metaphor this is from Calvin. If we are in an orchestra only for our own selves, to play whatever we want while ignoring the musicians next to us, it will be a cacophony of

disaster. When you see yourself as one of many musicians, you have to pay attention to what the other musicians are doing, listening for tempo, style, and volume. You have to watch the conductor, looking for direction. It orients you to looking beyond yourself.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.

Our call to praise God orients us toward God. And in a world where we could focus our attention in many, many different places, the reminder to orient our lives, in praise, toward God is powerful.

You may have heard of the practice of a “gratitude journal”, where you spend a few minutes each day writing down a few things for which you are thankful that happened each day. And sometimes I do this in the morning when I first get up. I am grateful for.... If I’m looking for things about which you can be thankful, I’ve discovered I tend to see them everywhere.

Some days my gratitude is easy to see and abundant, making it hard to choose only 3 things. Even on hard days full of frustration, I can always find 3 things. I’ve been grateful for laughter when I am waiting in line, for autumn leaves in both rich and muted colors, and for no leaks in the church during big rains.

Gratitude is another form of praise. It is a claim that in the midst of the world we’re in, we’re aware of blessing and gift.

Studies have shown that this simple exercise has beneficial health effects. Tending to gratitude improves physical and psychological health. It enhances empathy and reduces aggression. It improves self-esteem and increases mental strength.

Orienting my life toward praise and gratitude is not an act of putting on rose colored glasses and refusing to see the broken and painful parts of the world. It helps me from letting the broken and painful parts of the world take over too much real estate in my soul, which gives me the energy and the strength to work to make the world less broken, less painful.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.

Making a joyful noise to the Lord, when the world around us seems hellbent on destruction and pain, is a counter cultural act of defiance. When we can find joy and praise in the face of death, loss, and human-caused pain, we turn, we re-orient the world toward God. We claim that death will not win. We sing hope to a world hearing despair.

The writer of Colossians was concerned about how the new followers of Jesus way were incorporating their beliefs and faith into action. Or maybe how their actions could inform their faith. Clothe yourselves – put on new garments that show your heart that has been transformed by God’s love and grace. And as you clothe yourselves – be thankful. Be people of gratitude. Such a basic and profound message.

Be thankful each day and be thankful on Thanksgiving. I think about all the different tables represented in this room where people may be eating on Thanksgiving. You may be eating alone by choice or by absence of an invitation. You may be eating with family. You may be eating with friends who are like family and have become family. You may be eating in a dining room where you live, your community of friends.

Around all these tables - there will be people facing health struggles and hopes for treatment, joys and sorrows, memories and questions about what is next. There may strained relationships and new relationships are blossoming. Grief is often occupying an empty chair at the Thanksgiving table.

This week when we sit down at a table for Thanksgiving, for a brief moment, may we imagine that past and the future don’t exist. We sit down in a moment of gratitude. For the purpose of gratitude.. Gratitude is a moment of joy that is a break from time itself. It is a time out from all the struggles, from the pain behind us and the unknown ahead, because the power of gratitude is that it holds us in a moment, a moment that doesn’t anticipate the future or regret the past. It takes us for a short time outside of our existence, while also holding the truth of our existence with it.

As people seeking to follow the ways of Jesus, we are a people oriented in praise toward hope. Hope that the promises God made have been embodied in Jesus and made a fullness in Christ. So, we make a joyful noise in hope that our work together as God’s people the song of the Psalmist, true for the people in our community, for those who mourn, for the people still seeking the justice of equality, for all who live in the midst of despair and war.

We answer the psalmist’s call to shout with joy. Not blithe happiness, as if nothing were wrong in the world around us, but that joy that wells up in our souls when we remember that the pain and sorrow in this world do not have the final say.

English essayist Samuel Johnson once said, "Gratitude is a fruit of great cultivation." We can liken gratitude to joy, a "fruit of the spirit." Gratitude is not only an emotion; it is something we do. It is like tending a garden. It takes planting and watering and weeding. It takes time and attention. It takes learning. It takes routine. But, eventually, the ground yields, shoots come forth, and thanksgiving blooms. Let’s tend gratitude today, on Thursday and everyday. Amen.

1) <https://marciglass.com/2017/06/10/programmed-to-praise/>