

Psalm 100

- ¹ Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the lands!
² Serve 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 for ever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.

If I could, I would have a machine that would shake this building so we could feel the ground tremble. I'd have cannons go off and cymbals and trumpets and drums. I'd have fireworks outside and music, banners, and dancing inside. This is that kind of praise and thanksgiving that is meant in Psalm 100.

There is a clever parallel to this in Psalm 47: ¹"Clap your hands, all people! Shout to God with loud songs of joy! . . . ⁵God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. ⁶Sing praises to God, sing praises!"

There are times in our lives when that type of exuberance just happens. Think of the end of World War II, August 14, 1945, when Japan's Emperor Hirohito broadcast his surrender on Radio Japan. As the news spread to the US, people came out in the streets cheering and shouting. The famous kissing photo (the elated Navy sailor kissing a woman), was taken in New York City's Time Square on this day. The war was over.

Even if we don't show it every Sunday, we know that exuberant joy is at the heart of the Christian message. Think of Handel's Messiah, the Halleluia chorus and the great sevenfold "Amen." Handel not only wrote The Messiah, he also wrote the coronation hymn for King George II in 1727; we use part of his Oratorio, Judas Maccabeus, at Easter, which we know as the hymn, "Thine is the Glory! Risen, conquering Son"

In the story of the birth of Jesus in Luke 2, the angels sing "Glory!" At Easter we stand and sing: "Christ the Lord is risen today, Halleluia." Or in Rev 4:8, 11 they sing "Holy, Holy, Holy," and the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders bow down. And we remember that it doesn't mean bow by nodding one's head, or bow from the waist down, or even the knee. It means bow flat on your face because it is the kind of adoration and celebration.

When it says in this psalm “enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise,” it is about the temple. Maybe you have seen models of Solomon’s temple, its cedar walls coated with gold, and with its inner sanctum, the Holy of Holies. What we don’t have pictured for us is, of course, that the temple was also a place for sacrifice.

Worship in the Temple sometimes involved sacred dance. We read about this in Psalm 149:3: “Let them praise his name with dancing.” And Psalm 150:4: “Praise him with timbrel and dance.”

We have some difficulty swaying and shouting in church in praise, joy, and thanksgiving. It’s not in our Northern European nature, as it is in some South American and African cultures.

I am reminded of the story of the boy who went to his friend Tom’s birthday party and his mother instructed him: “When you leave, remember to say ‘Thank you’ to Tom’s mother.” When he got back from the birthday party, his mother asked: “Did you say ‘Thank you?’” And he said, “No.” Taken back, she asked sternly: “Why not?” And he said because the boy ahead of him said “Thank you,” and she said: “Don’t mention it,” so I didn’t.

That’s kind of the way we are. We let others do it, forgetting how everything is different because of his cross and resurrection, forgetting how the Lord has “snatched us from the jaws of the devil and made us his own” (Large Catechism, Baptism 4/83).

The Psalmist writes: “One thing I have asked of the Lord . . . that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord” (Psalm 27:4).

Or as Psalm 96:9 states: “Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.” Another translation says: “in the splendor of holiness” (ESV), meaning that which blazes forth. Holiness is so beyond us that we cannot even comprehend or even look at it. As the Psalmist says: “Tremble before him, all the earth” (Psalm 96:9) (See also I Chronicles 16:29, Psalm 29:2).

We see that translations differ (“beauty of holiness,” “splendor of holiness”), and this brings up how one goes from one time, place, and language to another. For example, Psalm 100:3 says: “We are the sheep of his pasture.” If you were trying to bring this to pygmies in Central Africa in the Congo, you’d have a tough time with that one.

Pygmies are very short so they can walk easily under the lush canopy of the jungle. Because they are short, they can take the heat of the jungle more easily. But they have never seen a sheep, a goat, a deer or herded animals. If you are going to say to them: “The Lord is our shepherd, and we are the sheep of his pasture,” it doesn’t mean anything to them. How does one convey this?

Or consider the word “*Gemütlichkeit*” in German. It’s quite difficult to translate this word into English. It is sometimes translated “comfortable,” but to Germans it means much more. It

means a family getting together on Sunday afternoon to eat and relax together. Or meeting up with friends on a summer evening at a local restaurant. *Gemütlichkeit* captures the feeling of friendliness, contentment, and belonging. It's a word that layers physical and mental sensations. You can see why a simple dictionary definition in English doesn't cut it. It can't be translated that with one word; it takes a whole paragraph!

This is what is happening with Psalm 100, as Christians have used it in hymns that we know, for example, "All People That on Earth Do Dwell," and the Doxology. See how the Doxology is like Psalm 100:

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow
Praise him all creatures here below
Praise him above ye heavenly hosts
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."

What about the third line: "Praise him above ye heavenly hosts"? There's no mention of heavenly hosts, of angels in Psalm 100. What is going on here?

Psalm 100:1 says: "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the lands" or "all the earth." From the Hebrew point of view, the earth includes the lower heavens. That would include the heavenly hosts. The fellow who wrote the Doxology, Thomas Ken (1637-1711), wanted to bring in the Holy Spirit, and the fact that "heavenly hosts" and "Holy Ghost" rhyme, probably explains this way of stating this.

Finally, we come to the matter of how we use this Psalm. First of all, we remember that sacrifice is over. Yet we are called upon to make the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. But that's not because the Lord needs it. In Psalm 50:12 the Lord says (paraphrase): "If I were hungry, I wouldn't need to come to you." No, it's because we need it. We need to be caught up in thanksgiving and glory to God. We need to "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

Psalm 100:3 says: "Know that the Lord is God! It is he who made us, and we are his." Not only that he possesses us; we are his, but also we can depend on him. It has this double-sidedness that is brought out in the next line: "We are his people and the sheep of his pasture."

Then comes: "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise." Give thanks. Bless his name. All of that is the same thing. Blessing, praising, giving thanks, that's what it is all about.

After "Give thanks to him," comes "bless his name." That's where we, as people of the New Covenant, are able to bring in the Trinity. For the people of the Old Covenant, that's

Jehovah. But for us it's Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in the mystery of the Holy Trinity, one in three, three in one. (For this reason, we don't call God by other names or many names.)

In this Psalm, as in all four Psalms so far, what is lifted up above all, is his "steadfast love." The one-sided covenant. As Psalm 100:5 states: "For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations."

The Lord is the one who not only made us, and we are his, but he continues and is faithful in his steadfast love forever. Amen