

I'm preaching on Psalm 100 this morning because I feel that it is a time for celebration. It is a joy for us to be able to meet together for worship – even though we are still in the middle of this pandemic and cannot yet all meet together physically at one time. Still this is a big step and a reason for us to celebrate. The next passage in our series on the book of Revelation is more about God's judgments upon the earth and while it is important that we deal with passages like that, there are times when we rightly focus our attention on passages that are specially suited for the occasion and I have decided that Psalm 100 is perfectly suited for this occasion as we rejoice in God's goodness in allowing us to meet together in significantly larger numbers than has been possible for the last 13 weeks.

Psalm 100 is about joyful worship and that is what we are going to focus on this morning. The Psalm alternates between calling its readers to worship and giving reasons for worship. By meditating on these five verses we dwell on the nature of worship itself and we dwell on the God whom we worship.

Worship involves making a joyful noise to the LORD. There is no question that it is possible to be joyful in a quiet way, but much of the time joy and noise go together. This is especially the case when people are together in groups. When there is joy and togetherness there tends to be joyful noise. And joy and togetherness are very much part of the worship of God and so is noise. And here God himself is calling us to that. "Make a joyful noise to the LORD...."

And the fact that we are called to make a joyful noise to the LORD, tells us something about the LORD. He elicits joy. There is something about God that causes people to rejoice when they think of him. That, of course, assumes salvation. People who are not saved do not rejoice in the Lord. They hate him. They may be afraid of him. Thinking of him does not cause them joy. But it does for God's people. God has forgiven the sins of his people. He is reconciled to them. The relationship between God and his people is at least at the beginning of what it ought to be and so the joy of God's people that thinking of God produces is the appropriate response to God.

God is so wonderful in his person and in what he has done that the more we know him the more joy in him that we experience. God is the perfect expression of goodness and wisdom and power and justice and truthfulness and love and mercy and grace. But that is just a list of words. God is a personal being who is the perfect embodiment of every good and attractive characteristic. He is the ultimately attractive person. And he has expressed those characteristics in creating the world and in saving and caring for his people and in judging the wicked. We know God because he reveals himself to us and he does that by speaking, but also by his actions.

That is clear from the fact that the text refers to the LORD [all caps]. This is the name God revealed to Moses in connection with the exodus story – I am that I am or Yahweh. And that connects him to history and particularly to the history of God rescuing his people from the slavery in Egypt. The God who elicits a joyful noise from his people is the God who has been active in history rescuing his people from slavery. For us as NT

Christians, God has revealed himself to us supremely in Jesus and what he has done to rescue us from the ultimate slavery of sin.

The fact that God is the great source of joy for his people speaks to how wonderful he is and what a blessing it is to worship him. This is part of the wonder of God's goodness. Whatever he asks us to do is always for our benefit as well as his glory. God wants us to worship him. God wants us to bring him glory. And doing that is the most delightful and enriching thing we can do.

And so here, in calling us to worship him God says, "Make a joyful noise to the LORD...." Worshipping God gives great joy. Thinking about God's goodness and beautiful character and marvelous deeds produces joy in our hearts and then we get more joy by expressing that joy with our words. There is something about seeing something wonderful that makes us want to put our feelings into words – to share the experience with other people. It is a profoundly beautiful truth that God has designed us to experience so much pleasure in not only savoring his beauty, but also expressing that to one another. The joyful noise of which the text speaks is a sharing together in the joy of worshipping God.

What comes next in this first line is the phrase, "all the earth." The call to "Make a joyful noise to the LORD" is addressed to "all the earth." The worship that is being described here is the worship of God's people, but there is inherent in worship a call for everyone in the whole world to join in. The reason that it is such a natural thing to call everyone in the world to join in is that God is the God of the whole world.

The reason that God is so worthy of worship is that there is only one of him and he is so great and glorious that there can only be one of him. God is so great and glorious because he is infinite and there can not be two infinite beings. In Isaiah 46:9, God says, "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me." That is why all the earth is included in the call to make a joyful noise to the Lord. There is only one God. Any other god that the peoples of the earth may worship is infinitely inferior to the true God.

This human impulse to invite others to share in our joy is an important factor of the missionary impulse. It is human to want others to share our joy. When we are being renewed in the image of God we are growing towards being more fully human. And so we want everyone to share in the joy of knowing God. Of course there are other aspects to the missionary mandate. It is commanded. It has to do with the coming of God's kingdom. But this is an important part of it as well. The more we are sanctified the more we want everyone to share in the joy of knowing and worshipping God. And the joy is multiplied as more and more people share in it. That's why it is such a joy for us to worship together in groups. That is why the multitude in heaven is one that no one can number. Worshipping in that multitude will be the ultimate joy.

So when we think of who God is and how much joy we experience in worshipping him we echo these words "Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!"

The next line is “Serve the LORD with gladness.” It is significant that the Bible often uses the same word to refer to service and to refer to worship. That is true both for the Hebrew of the OT and the Greek of the NT. It means that there is a very close relationship between what we think of as service and what we think of as worship. When we think of service, we tend to think of the kinds of things we do when we are not worshipping. We serve God by doing our daily work as an offering to him. We serve God by acts of love and kindness. We serve God by keeping his commandments. And then we have times set aside for worship – personal worship – family worship – and congregational worship. And it is perfectly ok to make that distinction as long as we realize that what we think of as service and what we think of as worship are really just variations of the same thing – the offering of our lives to God.

We see this in Romans 12:1 where Paul tells Christians “to present [their] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” And then he goes on to speak about living the Christian life. He is speaking about what we think of as service and he uses the language of worship. What that means is that the Bible does not make much of a distinction between service and worship. Service is worship and worship is service.

That does not mean that there is no distinction at all. What Psalm 100 is speaking about is the gathered worship of the people of God. Verse 4 says “Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.” If we erase the distinction altogether we have moved away from the biblical teaching that our response to God’s goodness and glory includes the service of our everyday activities and the service of time set apart to praise and worship the Lord. But the point is that the two are so closely related to one another that the Bible uses the same word for both and that fact sheds wonderful light on both what we think of as service and what we think of as worship. Service is a form of worship and worship is a form of service. And so the Psalmist in speaking about gathered worship says, “Serve the LORD with gladness.”

He continues, “Come into his presence with singing!” Singing is where the “joyful noise” comes from. Now the initial context for this Psalm is the temple worship. God was present in the temple in a special way and when his people gathered before him at the temple, they came into his presence. That of course has changed with the coming of Christ. Jesus is the fulfillment of the temple and the church is also the temple – God is present in a special way in the gathering of his people.

We see this most clearly in Hebrews 12:22ff where the author speaks of the assembly of the NT church for worship, “[Y]ou have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.” When the church on earth assembles for worship, it actually joins the worship of heaven. We become before God. We come before Jesus. We enter into the presence of God in a way that is more profound than the OT worship at the temple.

And one of the things that believers do in the presence of God is sing. “Come into his presence with singing!” Now singing does not always have to be joyful. There are many songs of lament in the Psalms. But certainly joy and singing often go together. Being in the presence of God is a great source of joy for believers and singing is one of the greatest expressions of joy. As we saw earlier joy does not have to be noisy, but it often is. And that joyful noise is often the result of singing.

One of the things that we have missed the most over the last thirteen weeks is singing together. We have kept up our singing the best that we could under the circumstances, but we have missed the profound experience of singing together as a congregation. And we are thankful that we can enter more fully into that experience now.

The importance of singing in worship makes the decision-making about singing very difficult. The reason is that singing is very conducive to spreading the virus. The virus seems to be spread mostly by droplets from our breath and singing spews out a lot more droplets into the air than simply breathing. One of the ways that we are seeking to minimize the risk is by limiting the number of verses that we sing in a worship service. On the one hand singing is so important that we are willing to take some risk in order to sing together. On the other hand, we want to minimize the risk. Singing less is one of the ways that we are doing that.

Anyway, let's rejoice in the Lord that we can begin to sing together in greater numbers and that even those who cannot be physically present can sing along with the congregation that is gathered here.

Verse 3 focuses on God and our relationship to him. The reason we worship is God. “Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his, we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.” Worship begins with knowing that the LORD [Yahweh] is God! It begins with the acknowledgement that the God of Israel – the God of the Bible – the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is God. The whole Bible teaches that there is only one true God – the God of the Bible. And this Psalm about worship includes this command to “Know that the LORD, he is God!”

The heart of worship is the acknowledgement that the LORD is God. This is the great and basic ethical requirement of human existence – to acknowledge that the LORD is God. The Bible speaks of this in different ways. Sometimes the NT speaks of unbelievers as those who do not know God. But other times it speaks of unbelievers as those who do know God but who suppress that knowledge. Romans 1:21 says of unbelievers, “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him....” Earlier in that passage Paul says that the unrighteous suppress the truth. Deep down all people know God, but the unrighteous suppress the truth and so there is a sense in which they do not know God.

But knowing God is the basic ethical requirement upon all people and so the acknowledgement of the existence of the God of the Bible is the foundation of worship. The most important thing in life is the knowledge of God. We are required to know God. And our first response to God is acknowledging that he is

God. And that remains an important foundation for our worship. We acknowledge with joy and adoration that “the LORD, he is God!”

But to acknowledge that the LORD is God is at the same time to say something about our relationship to God. If God is God we are not God. “It is he who made us and we are his.” When we acknowledge that the LORD, he is God, we acknowledge that “It is he who made us....” To acknowledge God to be God is to acknowledge him to be the creator and ourselves to be created. That is the most basic and significant fact about us as human beings. We do not exist independently of God. We have been made by God for God. We are creatures who exist to do what we were created to do and that is to respond to God in service and worship. The fact that God made us is the most significant thing about us.

And worship is about acknowledging that fact. We come into the presence of God with singing acknowledging that “the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us.... Part of our joyful worship is happily taking our place before him as people he has made. There is great joy in humbling ourselves before God and acknowledging him as the one who made us. The sin of exalting ourselves in the presence of God is monstrous and grotesque. It is not a happy place to be. We are not designed for that. There is no real joy in it. The joy is in being who we were created to be – to humbly embrace our creaturehood and to acknowledge God to be the one who is worthy of worship and to gladly take our place before him as worshipers.

The text goes on to speak of the relationship between God and his people. “It is he who made us, and we are his, we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.” Here the focus is on the special relationship that God has with his people. We belong to God by virtue of creation. But above and beyond that we “are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.”

Here the text focus on the fact that God has chosen his people from out of all the other people in the world. The great message of the Bible is that we are all sinners worthy of death, but that God has chosen a people to himself through whom he is at work to bring salvation to the world. The people of God are a people set apart from all the other people of the world. The Bible makes it clear that the purpose of that setting apart is to bless all the families of the earth. But to belong to that people is huge reason for praise. There is no greater blessing on earth than to belong to the people of God. God is our shepherd. He cares for us. He feeds us. He protects us. He leads us. And in Jesus he lays down his life for us and gives us abundant life.

Because of who God is – because he is so wonderful – because of who we are as creatures designed to flourish in his service, a huge part of our joyful worship has to do with his mercy in including us to belong to his people. The Bible makes it clear that we are no better than others. It makes it clear that we are not chosen because of anything good about us. We are all sinners worthy of death. But God has chosen us for salvation. He has sent Jesus to be our Saviour. He has brought us from death to life. He has taken away all our sins. And so we live in the light of his favor. We experience the blessedness of living for him. And that is a huge part of the reason for joyful worship. God demonstrates so much of his glory in the love and grace that he has shown to us in Jesus.

Verse 4 turns again to the nature of worship. “Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!” Thanksgiving is a key part of worship. Thanksgiving is the acknowledgement of all the good that we receive from God. Everything that is good in our lives comes from God. Life itself comes from God. Then there is God’s forgiveness and renewal in Christ. There is the joy of a relationship with God. There is the joy of belonging to his people. There are the rich experiences of beauty and pleasure and fulfillment and fascination that are enjoyed as expressions of God’s love and generosity and bounty. The fact that thanksgiving is such an important part of worship means that God is such a giving God. We are thankful because God showers us with good things. And that in turn reveals to us more of God’s desire to bless. Thanksgiving is gratitude for gifts given, but it is especially concerned with the kind and generous character of the giver. And so it is mixed with praise. “Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him and bless his name.”

The verse 5 turns again to God himself as the one who is so worthy of our worship. “For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.” Three characteristics of God that are reasons for singing and joyful noise and service and thanksgiving and praise.

“[T]he Lord is good.” How simple and yet how profound! There is good and there is evil. We experience both. We contribute to both. The hope of the gospel is that through Christ good has and will triumph over evil, in our lives and in the whole world. Our lives are lived in the context of good and evil. But God is pure goodness. He is always and only good. He is good through and through. All that he does is good. 1 John 1:5 says that “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”

Is that not reason for making a joyful noise? Evil is a great mystery. It is a terrible thing. It is the cause of all misery and suffering. But we know that the ultimate reality in the universe is not evil but good and not good as an abstraction but as a glorious person who made all things. We know that evil does not come from God. We know that he has overcome evil in Jesus. We know that God is working towards a good end. And that God is working all things for the good of his people. Psalm 145:7 says of the worship of God’s people “They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.”

Then Psalm 100 mentions that the LORD’s “steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.” These two phrases explain one another. Steadfast love and faithfulness are closely related. The idea has to do with a love that endures and so faithfulness to the relationship. Both the steadfast love and the faithfulness last forever. “[H]is steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.”

So God’s goodness is not fickle. It endures forever. And in particular his relationship of love with his people is completely permanent. 1 Timothy 2:13 says, “if we are faithless, he remains faithful.”

Therefore we are secure. One of the glorious things about a good marriage is security in the relationship because both partners are faithful. But no human being is as faithful as God is faithful. And on top of that

God's faithfulness – his steadfast love – is forever. It is faithful through death. There is security in God's love in every circumstance through death and into eternity.

God has shown this to us supremely in his Son. Jesus is the ultimate expression of the steadfast love and faithfulness of God. We are promised that if we come to Jesus we will never be cast out. We are promised that in Christ we have eternal life and that nothing will ever separate us from the love of Christ. That's because the love of Christ is a steadfast love.

What reason then to make a joyful noise to the LORD and to call all the earth to join us! The worship of God is a very profound thing. It is the response of the creature to the creator, but it is also the response of the saved to their saviour and the response of the people who are designed for worship to the one who is the worthy of worship.

What blessing it is to know God, to belong to him, to be his people and to have the great blessing and joy to come before him in worship!