

“SERVE THE LORD WITH GLADNESS.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Psalm 100

Introduction.

Yesterday eight shifts of 60 people from First CRC worked at five Serve sites around our community and accomplished much for the glory of God and blessing and benefit of those served. I visited three of the sites and was especially blessed to see whole families serving together, even three generations. The Serve team of six volunteers did a fantastic job preparing and equipping the sites and guiding the work. We will have 4 worksites next Saturday.

Molly H said, “I had scheduled 45 to 50 people to work today, but we ended up with around 60 and they all did an amazing job! We got so much good work done today. More than we thought that we could get done in one day. What an amazing church family we have!!”

Psalm 100

Psalm 100 is the psalm from which Serve took its theme statement this year, verse 5. It also has a verse that has Serve written all over it. Serve the Lord with Gladness.

This Psalm is much beloved, one of many favorites in the Psalter, often referred to as Old Hundredth. It is an exuberant Psalm, it stirs the soul to sing and praise God.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord.

Worship the Lord with gladness.

Come into His presence with singing.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.

It is also that Psalm of encouraged to all the bad singers in the world, “Make a joyful noise to the Lord.”

It has four stanzas but two parts, that form an AB AB pattern, 1 and 3 go together and 2 and 4, back and forth. Praise God, know God, praise God, know God.

The two are inseparable. You can't praise what you don't know, and to know God truly leads to praise. You could call it doxology and theology. Great doxology always flows from great doctrine.

God has revealed Himself to us in such a way that He may be known with our heads and praised from our hearts. Our singing is grounded in the knowing.

Satan knows God, but Satan doesn't sing. If our knowledge of God doesn't lead to worship, it is worthless. And if our singing is without knowledge it is just noise, it doesn't glorify God.

Stanza One, vss. 1-2.

The Psalmist starts with shouting and singing, joyfully and with gladness.

Serve the Lord with gladness is a parallel thought with come into His presence with singing. Serve is used here to mean worship, make a sacrifice. Worship happens whenever we make ourselves available to God to do whatever He wills, whatever He asks of us. Worship is service.

We hear this same idea in Romans 12

Romans 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

We hear this when Isaiah has his vision of God and he responded in worship by saying, “Here am I, Lord, send me.”

That’s worship. That’s why you can worship when you sweep the floor, change the diaper, take out the trash, do honey do projects, help someone in need, do something that can’t be paid back, serve in Serve, volunteer for the church family. Whatever you do, do to the glory of God.

Gladness. This is not optional, this is the right mood or spirit that is fitting to the blessings and benefits God has so richly poured out on us.

God calls us and commands us to worship, but He also tells us how to worship. It is not just showing up and sitting there. It is with singing, with a glad and joyful heart.

What adjectives would you use to describe your worship of God? Would you characterize it as glad, joyful, happy, cheerful, jubilant, delighted?

What kind of worship do you think most honors God as God? Or flows from those who have been rescued, forgiven, redeemed and saved?

If there is no cause for gladness in your life, then you don’t know God, you don’t know the salvation of Jesus Christ, you don’t have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. That should be enough to cause you to seek Him with everything you have, until those things are realities in your life.

Stanza Two, vs. 3.

To know is the firm foundation of worship. To worship God with gladness you must know God. If you don’t know God, your worship will be anemic, if it can even be called worship at all.

This stanza of three lines is packed with insight about what we must know to have this kind of affection toward God.

- 1) The Lord is God.
- 2) He made us.
- 3) We are his people, like sheep in the pastures of a shepherd.

Know who God is. He is Lord, meaning Yahweh, I am who I am. This is the one true God, the covenant making God.

To know that the Lord is God is a declaration that God alone is God, all other gods are not God, they are false, they are lifeless, worthless idols.

Know where we have come from and whose we are. It is He who made us and we are His. It is He who made us and not we ourselves. Idolaters worship what they have made, we worship who made us.

We are completely dependent on Him for our being, our life, our existence, our survival. He is our rightful owner, our Lord, our Master, our Father. We belong body and soul to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ. We are not free to do our will, but to do His will.

Finally, know our status or standing with God. We are favored, we are His people, we are the sheep of His pasture.

As His sheep, He loves us and cares for us, He provides for us, and leads and guides us. The sheep of His pasture. It is truly a joyful thing to have a God like this.

To what do we owe this privilege? To what can we credit this honor? How is this even possible that the likes of us can be counted as His people, the sheep of His pasture? How can a son of Adam become a son of God? How is it that we have been chosen from out of all the people of the world?

Pure mercy and grace. And that is cause for glad worship and joyful thanksgiving.

We don't sing hymns in praise of what we have done and how much we have accomplished for our salvation. The great hymns of our faith are all in praise of God for being God, for being sovereign, for delivering us from our sin and for redeeming us by the blood of Jesus, for calling us to Himself, for carrying us through life and for securing for us eternal life.

This leads us back to worship in stanza three.

Stanza Three, vs. 4.

The Psalmist returns to the heart, this time with thanksgiving, praise, and blessing His name.

This is not knowledge for the sake of knowing, this is knowledge for the sake of worshipping and giving thanks.

We are so used to this invitation that the wonder of it may escape us. The Psalmist is calling us to enter into the very presence of the living God of the universe. Come into the throne room of the greatest King in all of creation.

This isn't just the outer courts, or even the Holy Place, but into the very Holy of Holies. This place that is shut off to all who are unholy, to all who are unclean.

Hebrews 10:19-20 ... we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 *by the new and living way that he opened for us* through the curtain, that is, through his flesh.

The veil has been torn, the curtain has been pulled back, and we have the sacred privilege of doing what couldn't be done for thousands of years. This is cause for more praise and worship.

Now let me pause here and talk about one of the practical realities of this in our lives.

We all come to worship carrying with us the stuff of the past week or past month or more, stuff that hangs all over us.

Some of that is good or even great and makes for easy praise and thanksgiving and glad worship. A good report, a clean bill of health, a promotion, a good month at work, a big harvest, a new grandchild. All of this we can bring before the God with gratitude, with hearts full of praise.

But what about those of us who come with significant burdens, with the stresses and pressures of life piled up on our shoulders? Those things can be labeled the *hard providences* of God that He brings into all our lives from time to time. It may be a bad report, trouble at work or home, a prodigal child, financial strains, a person who is making your life very difficult, fear, worry, depression, or a host of other possibilities.

How do you worship with gladness and come into God's courts with praise with all that?

I Thessalonians 5:16-18 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Ephesians 5:20 Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, you bring all that with you and you lay it before God, and you worship Him, knowing who He is and what He has done, not worshipping based on who you are and what you have or haven't done.

Bless and praise Him when He gives, and bless and praise Him when He takes away. Bless Him in all circumstances. Bless Him in Covid, bless Him in the chaos of our times, bless Him in the changes and losses, bless Him when the Fair goes away, bless Him whatever happens with our schools and business and churches.

When we can give thanks and worship God with gladness for who He is, when we can worship God with gladness confident that He is good and faithful and true, that is mature faith, that is mature worship. That worship is based not on the fickleness of our circumstances but on the faithfulness of our unchanging God.

Stanza Four, vs. 5.

He returns to the head, to knowing some more things about our God. Verse three focused on God's authority and power, verse 5 on His goodness and mercy.

- 1) He is good.
- 2) His lovingkindness is everlasting.
- 3) His faithfulness endures to all generations.

Here is that OT word that I have told you I love so much. *Hesed*, steadfast mercy and love, covenant loyalty and love, from everlasting to everlasting the same, it is unwavering, it endures forever, for all eternity. It extends to all generations, keeping even to a thousand generations.

Notice what is true here about God? God never runs out or runs dry, God never ends. God's nature and gifts and grace endure forever, they are everlasting. This was written three thousand years ago, and it hasn't come close to running out yet or changing.

Can you imagine what life would be like and what our world would be like if God was changeable, inconsistent, wavering, vacillating, capricious, unpredictable, unreliable, moody?

If God never ceases to do us good, if His love toward us endures forever, if His faithfulness and wisdom and truth are everlasting, then our praise can never cease. For it to cease would be ingratitude at the very least. How can we weary of worship when we are so richly blessed and He is so entitled? Anything else or anything less is to rob Him of glory.

Think about what the Psalmist is saying here about God. If God was good and loving and merciful then, how much more is He now on this side of the cross?

Romans 5:6-8 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for

Implications and application.

Ignorance about God leads to every sin and evil, every social problem, to all our problems.

Ignorance about God is the cause of our turning from Him to other things.

Ignorance about God is the cause of our confusion and chaos about sickness and disease, about social problems, about racism and injustice, about fear and anxiety.

Ignorance about God makes our worship weak, or secondary, or not a big deal to us.

Ignorance about God leads our children to wander from worship and from faith.

Ignorance about God makes us selfish and self-centered.

Worshipping God.

This impacts our worship and our worshipping together.

This is a call to the whole community, the people of God. This is a call to the worshipping community. We are call to worship together as much as is possible. If you are staying home

because it is convenient, or you like the comfort of your own home, you are not honoring the Lord and you are not worshipping as He has called us to worship.

If you are staying home just because it is easier, more comfortable, more convenient, or gives you more time to yourself, you aren't worshipping and glorifying God. Don't neglect or treat so casually so great a God who has shown us so great a mercy.

The most joyful and happy being in the universe should be worshipped by the most joyful, cheerful people. And that means with singing, with a glad and joyful heart.

God calls us out of the world into the fellowship of His family, into the body of Christ. God's people has always gathered together to honor and glorify and worship God, from the beginning of time to eternity in heaven.

Knowing God.

J.I. Packer, one of the churches great minds and hearts, died two weeks ago (July 17) at the age of 93. He was a great scholar and writer. He spent most of the last 40 years of his life teaching at Regent College in Vancouver.

I have about ten his books, no doubt one of the greatest of which is *Knowing God*. It has stood the test of time and I am confident will go down as one of the greatest Christian classics of the last century. It has had a profound influence on countless Christians and I have no hesitation in recommending it, in fact strongly encouraging you to get it and read it. I commend this book to all parents that they will have in them what they want to pass on. Use it in family devotions.

This knowledge of God is essential if we and our children are going to be worshippers of God. We must strive in our homes to pass on this knowledge not just for the sake of knowing, but for the sake of loving and affectionately singing and praise our God.

Serving God.

Service is worship. May we offer a sacrifice of praise as we serve God through serving others. May we freely give and spend and be spent, confident that we have all things from God and are never depleted when we give to God and others.

May we give and serve with glad and joyful hearts, even as Jesus, for the joy set before Him, laid down His life and served us.