

May 29, 2022 Sing Joyfully Psalm 100

Looking back over the last 2 years, I have learned several lessons. We spent a great proportion of the Pandemic unable to safely assemble at all. I don't think I will ever take attending or leading worship for granted again. We lost time. We lost opportunity. And we missed, I missed our being together. I particularly missed the singing that we do when we gather. That is why once again I find myself looking at the words of Psalm 100.

I want to share with you the opening line of Psalm 100 from three different translations of the Bible. The New International Version says it this way. "Shout for joy to the Lord all the earth." It is not obvious from that text that we are even talking about singing the praises of God. I shout when I am trying to carry on a conversation with my neighbour over the fence. The problem is distance. And I must admit, I shout because I hope he will shout back. My hearing has deteriorated further, and my hearing aids have failed. I shout at the television set when the umpire in the Blue Jays game calls a strike that was clearly a ball. I have to admit I do not think of shouting as part of the singing of God's praise.

The Good News Bible translates the same line as "Sing to the Lord, all the world." It is very clear it is talking about singing. And the singing is directed as to the Lord. And there appears to be an obligation on the part of the whole world to do so. It is actually quite different from the message in the NIV.

Then there is the King James Version. “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands.” First observation: it is a translation that is word for word of the original Hebrew. And I have to tell you I find that compelling. All translations have limitations. None are “perfect”. But I find this translation of this line meaningful. We are called to make a noise. A noise that is directed unto the Lord. All of us can do that. To make a noise you do not have to be Celine Dion, or Frank Sinatra, or George Beverly Shea. I just have to use my voice. You have to use yours. And yes the noise is supposed to be joyful. You are supposed to communicate by the tone of your voice, that you want to do it! You are motivated.

One of the things I really missed during the Pandemic, was the lack of opportunity to worship as an assembly. Yes we got creative about finding a substitute for in person worship, but it was not done as an assembly. I could not see you, or hear you, nor could I feel, what I feel, when I am with you and you are with me. I missed the choir. Singing in parts. The harmonies we create as we sing together. I missed Sherry’s leading us and accompanying us, reminding us when to breathe, and when not to. I missed the choir’s leading you in singing, but most of all I missed hearing the assembly sing. The church being the church at worship. We choose to do this together. And joyfully.

I notice too that there is an assumption or an implication in the 100th Psalm in the King James Version, that

this is a fundamentally human thing to do. All the lands are invited to it, called to it, urged to it...making a joyful noise to the Lord. God Almighty, Jesus our Saviour, The holy Spirit who urges us along from word to word and sound to sound. So all the lands are to be included in this activity. All the nations. All the people groups of the earth. And we are included, called to do our bit, to take part in it. Making a joyful noise to the Lord.

In the second verse the Niv says “Worship the Lord with gladness. Come before him with joyful songs.” It is definitely about singing. And we are supposed to be glad to be doing it.

The Good News Bible says bluntly, “Worship the Lord with Joy.” Joy is the watchword here. Our joy is apparently more important than our musicality. This is not about being a great singer, whatever that means. It is about communicating joy. Doing it because you want to do it. Doing it because you want the Lord to know you want to do it. And yes if I enjoy it, you probably get to see me smile. In a time when we are still wearing masks for the most part that becomes harder to communicate.

When It was mentioned to me that we should go back to standing to sing, I thought that was significant. I know we sing better when we stand. We breathe more deeply. We make more sound. It was like there was a collective will to let the sound loose. “Come before HIM, with happy songs.” Salvation songs? Definitely. Songs that lift the name of God, Jesus, the Spirit of holiness. Of course!

But again, here is what the word for word translation of the King James Version says: “Serve the Lord with gladness. Come before HIS presence with singing.” The emphasis here is on our serving God. Being HIS servants. Serving God in a spirit of gladness. I am glad to do it with you for HIM. This hour is about God, about Jesus, our blessed redeemer, about the Spirit who never leaves us alone and encourages us to faith and faithfulness. But yes! We are to come before God, singing. With our own voices. With our own power. And with our own accents. My life in song has been greatly affected by the late Pete Seeger. I still regard him as a passionate singer with an ability to arouse our conscience. Do you know how he described his voice? He wrote in one of his books, “I sing a cracked tenor.” He did not regard himself as having a great voice. He played Carnegie Hall every year into his 90’s. And he had this singular affect. He could get the Hall’s capacity audience singing like no other entertainer I have ever heard. And his ambition was not so much to be heard as to mobilize people to sing. That is what Psalm 100 is about. To get us mobilized to sing to the Lord. With gladness. Aware that we are called to sing for the King of Kings.

Verse 3 brings us to the heart of the matter. And amazingly all three translations are remarkably similar in their rendering of verse 3. So I will go right to the King James Version of it. “Know that the Lord HE is God.” It is not about us. Worship is something we render. And we render it because of what we know. And what we know is that God is, and HE is

Lord. When the church sings the church always gets it right. Here is what I mean. There is no debate when we sing the hymns a choruses. "He is Lord, He is Lord. He is risen from the dead and He is Lord." Or "Jesus loves me this I know/ For the Bible tells me so." Or "Holy, holy, Holy. Lord God Almighty." Clear. Precise declarations of faith.

"Know that the Lord HE is God, It is HE that has made us and not we ourselves." A visceral affirmation that God is the Creator. And we are the created. It is a bigger affirmation than that God is Master and we are servants. There is a holiness about the relationship when the created recognizes his or her Creator. We are not things. We are the miracles God made in the beginning to be related to HIM, and that HE might have relationship with us.

One last thought. The rest of verse 3 of Psalm 100. "We are HIS people, and the sheep of HIS pasture." The nature of the relationship. HE is our God. We are HIS people. HE is the good shepherd. We are the lambs he carries and leads, feeds and keeps safe. Why would we not make a joyful noise unto the Lord, and all of us together?

Let us pray;

O Lord, we do love to make a joyful noise before you as part of our worship. Sometimes we wonder how YOU could ever enjoy us, or our singing. And yet YOU do. Because YOU love us for gathering in this special space for this special time. Because here we are mindful of who YOU are, and therefore

mindful of who we are. We worship and adore you Lord and God. In these moments we get that right. Thanks for the blessing YOU offer. Amen