

Make a Joyful Noise
Psalm 100
October 3, 2021

I recall learning Psalm 100 in Bible School when I was in about fourth grade. It was the first scripture I memorized. At the time, I had not learned of the 23rd Psalm, which is better known, but the 100th may be second behind it. Of course, I learned it in the King James Version, at the time the only version used by my family although at the time I recall our church was using that new Revised Standard Version. Here it is in NRSV as in our lesson books:

Psalm 100

All Lands Summoned to Praise God

A Psalm of thanksgiving.

¹ Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

**² Worship 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,^[a]
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 forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.**

Footnotes

a. [Psalm 100:3](#) Another reading is *and not we ourselves*

This psalm is dated to the postexilic period, when the *Book of Psalms*, much as we have it, was brought together. At the time of Jesus, *Psalms* didn't quite have the status of scripture. It was not part of "The Law and the Prophets." Think of it being like our present-day hymnbooks for Jews of that day. Many of the psalms are attributed to David, a millennium earlier, and carried great significance.

Psalm 100 may be best thought of as a processional hymn. Imagine a congregation of the faithful arriving at the doors to the temple courts, singing this as they entered. It was specifically meant for entering in for a service of giving thanks and praise, at which offerings of thanksgiving would be made.

There are actually two separate hymns that make up this psalm, vs. 1-3 and 4-5. Think of them as two different stanzas to a song. Each is a call to worship followed by the grounds for the call. In each, the psalm recites what William R. Taylor has called the “creed” of Judaism (*The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 4, exegesis on Psalm 100, p.533). “This creed ... is made up of six capital statements:

- (a) the LORD is God;
- (b) he is our creator;
- (c) we are his people;
- (d) the LORD is good;
- (e) his kindness is everlasting;
- (f) his faithfulness endures to all generations.”

As Christians, we do not take issue with any of these statements! Sometimes Judaism is characterized differently in the *New Testament*, but this statement of essentials is something that we can all share. Indeed, I find that the joy in the creation expressed in this psalm reflects the account of Creation in Genesis 1 that we heard about in Rev. Zanicky’s message of last Sunday (September 26). It is a good creation, and we can take joy in it.

Here are some additional remarks. In verse 1, notice that it is “all the lands” (literally, all the earth) that are to make a joyful noise. The invitation and the blessings are not meant just for Israel, or just for the remnant of Judah. All lands, not just the Jews, are invited to worship the LORD in joy. That implies that the Gentiles have good reasons for joy as well. They are not to just there to be servants of a triumphant Jewish state ruled by a militant Messiah. Pilgrims from everywhere are welcomed, because the goodness of the LORD’s creation is meant for all.

In verse 2, the first word, word “serve” (KJV, RSV) or “worship” (NRSV), is a technical term meaning to perform as servants or subjects that which is proper in worship. That was expected in religions everywhere. An example is when Nebuchadnezzar demanded that everyone present, including Shadrack, Meshack, and Obednego, bow down to his golden idol when they heard the sound of the horn and a variety of other instruments (Daniel 3). There was no gladness on that

occasion. Nebuchadnezzar's demand for worship was based on power and fear. Similarly, subjects of the Roman Emperor were required to say, "Caesar is Lord," an act of worship, as they paid their taxes. Early Christians were persecuted when they would not do that. In contrast, those who serve the LORD come into his presence with gladness and singing.

In verse 3, the statement might be understood as, "the LORD ALONE is God!" Not, "the LORD is a god." After the Exile, the Jews made a firm commitment to monotheism. They would no longer also worship other gods, as they had in the lands of Israel and Judah before the fall of Jerusalem. This is a critically important statement. It's not just that the LORD is a god, but he is the only god, so that we can use the word God, capitalized, as a synonym for the LORD. The word god, uncapitalized, now refers to all those vain idols and imaginings of the pagans, who follow after their images or conceptions without having yet come to know the LORD. Even so, the LORD calls to them, too, to come rejoicing to his holy temple.

After the exile, Jews were spread all across the known world. Wherever they went, Gentile "God-fearers" came to know something of the LORD, as they learned about their Jewish neighbors. In many cases, they faithfully attended the synagogues and contributed to their construction and welfare, as attested to inscriptions uncovered in archaeology.

The King James Version reads, "It is he that made us, and not we ourselves." According to Taylor (op. cit.) "that is a translation of a text which was the result of a correction of the scribes confessedly made 'from motives of reverence, or to avoid anthropomorphic suggestions'". (Taylor is quoting a comment from another source.) I always remember the psalm including that, instead of, "... and we are his," since I learned the King James version all of those years ago.

We human beings are marvelously made. Consider what we do within our minds. Human beings have created art, music, things of beauty, things of magnificence, things of complexity, and even large organizations that do greater things. But, where did that amazing human mind come from? Was it self-invented? No! Indeed, all the stuff that in our day is called "Artificial Intelligence" isn't really intelligence. If you need proof, try to have an intelligent conversation with Amazon's "Alexa" application. We are far, far from anything as capable. And the rest of creation, did we do all that? No! Who did? We, as worshiping Jews or Christians, say "The LORD is God; it is he that made us." (And not we ourselves.)

Verse 3 conjures a well-known metaphor, “we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.” That resonates with David’s Psalm 23, “The LORD is my shepherd.” We are safe and cared for by the LORD. I can’t say that I know what it’s really like to be a sheep. They are typically cared for and protected from hazards. Sure, sometimes someone comes along and shears off all of that wool, and that’s not pleasant. But for the most part, I don’t think sheep spend their lives worrying about things. We should similarly be able to rely on God’s care for us.

In verse 4, we see that our response is thanksgiving, literally giving thanks. For what? If we have to ask that, maybe we are not in a fit state to worship. Instead of thinking of ourselves as God’s people, the sheep of his pasture, if we ask why we should be thankful, maybe we are somewhere else. Perhaps we are out in the wilderness, trying to avoid being eaten by wolves. Maybe that’s because we have gone astray. If that is the case, there are other scriptures, or other psalms, that address those who are wandering without knowing the LORD. Psalm 100 is for those who have found God and are thankful. The hymn “Count your Blessings” comes to mind. That was one of the favorites of Sally Weiss, who started our *Bible Study* class long ago.

But just in case you are having reasons wondering why to be thankful, verse 5 gives us the answers. We worship a good God. That is not a trivial distinction. If you read the myths about the Greek gods, or others of pagan belief, you will see the difference. Those gods, as was supposed, didn’t care much about humanity. They had to be bribed with offerings to fulfil their obligations to guide the Sun, or to provide rain, or whatever else was in the portfolio of each particular god. Life on earth was a struggle to survive, as the various selfish and uncaring gods disputed among themselves, causing destruction on the earth as an incidental side-effect. That was the pagan understanding of life.

We have the assurance of so much more. God is good. He cares for us. In the *New Testament* we read that His love was so generous, that he himself came and lived among us in the form of a man, teaching us what God was like, and ultimately giving up his life for us. Yes, as more than a sacrifice, God in Jesus was raised again as a sign, for all of those who might believe. His promise of love, and of keeping us as not just sheep, but as His children, are forever, beyond all generations.