

Psalm 100

Enter the Gates

This morning each of us walked through doors. The first door I walked through was from my bedroom to the kitchen. As I left my home, I walked through my lovely blue front door to get to my car door in the driveway. As I entered into the church there was the door at the top of the accessibility ramp that leads into the most used entrance of the church. And there were more doors as I went from the front entrance to my office. Then as I came into this time of worship, I passed through doors into this majestic sanctuary where stained glass and warm dark wood greet all of us as we spend this time together.

Each of these doors is significant to my day. Each door represents a part of my home and work life. We walk through doors consistently each day. From doors that are part of our home life to doors that take us into community whether for shopping, work, doctor or various other appointments, school, and so much more.

Doors are an opening into our lives. The psalmist writes, "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise." (vs 4). These gates are the doors that brought people into the temple, God's court so to speak. This psalm uses the language of royalty to help describe who God is, why we praise God and give thanksgiving, and how to do it.

The first line asserts that we are to "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth." For those of you who think you can't sing and so should hum or sing quietly, yours' are voices God wants to hear! Make a joyful noise! We don't need to praise God perfectly; we just need to make noise. The noise may be laughter or chatter as we connect with others. It may be music, but it is not limited to beautiful sounds that we seemingly connect with the heavenly angels, thinking that is the worship God desires.

People think that worship needs to be dignified and quiet. How many of us grew up being told to sit still in church and so still think that quiet is necessary. God loves to hear the sound of children in worship, even when it is distracting to us. The sound of children in worship is a joyful noise to the creator of all life. Quiet is not for God's sake, the quiet is in respect for those who need the stillness to focus on their time with God. Still there are times for joyful noise in the church and certainly elsewhere in our lives.

This psalm is filled with action. Make a joyful noise. Worship the Lord with gladness. Come into God's presence with singing. Enter God's gates with thanksgiving. Give thanks to God. Bless God's name.

Recently I had a conversation with someone about how we worship and how it must appear to many that all of this singing, praising, our prayers, could seem so foreign.

Even for me, I think at times that worshipping God is a strange thing to do. And there are many groups and organizations that demand the worship of a human being or their power. Really even money seems to want our worship. Humans and power want our loyalty, our lives, demand our time and energy without giving us much back.

Worshipping God is not done to take from our lives. Our worship is a response to the life-giving energy, freedom, and release that is a life with God as our one and only sovereign and because God is good. Good in the sense that God has been faithful and an enduring presence, kind and loving to those who look to God for their strength, their hope, their meaning and purpose.

As I wrote, I was also keenly aware that right now across the globe it must seem to many that God is not present. There are people who have literally had their doors blown off their homes, and have no home. They have become refugees in their own lands and in lands far from their homes. War and natural disaster have taken any doors that may have been theirs to walk through and dismantled all that they have known to be their security and familiar to them. I heard from someone the other day that when asked where is God is Gaza, the answer was God is in the rubble.

That answer could not have brought much hope or solace to anyone. God is with people, not in the rubble, but in the hearts and minds, in the spirit of the people. And when faced with that kind of terror and chaos, it must be almost impossible to feel that God is with you. To be honest, we often don't realize that God has been with us all along until we are in a position to reflect and ponder what we have experienced. Still, I have met people that have trusted God's provision in the most challenging of circumstances. Have felt the peace that comes only through the knowledge of God's Holy Spirit with them. It is something I know from my own life to be true.

Which brings me to another line in the psalm from verse 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." The word "know" in this context is about total intimacy. It can actually refer to sexual intimacy, but in this case is about just how intimately God knows each of us and we can know God. God made us, created us, cares for us as a shepherd cares and tends to the concerns and safety of the sheep that are the shepherd's responsibility.

Though we may not know or feel that God is with us, we can be assured that it is not our feelings that we need to trust, but the word of God that says, I am with you always. I love you; you are valuable, you are mine. It doesn't mean that it takes away the harm or the struggle. I certainly wish I had a better way to describe that for which there seems to be no words, the presence of God with you. But God is always present no matter what kind of door you have to walk through, be it a physical door or a figurative door.

Our doors might be ones of fear and or failure. Doors of illness and hopelessness, doors of joy and promise. In many churches there are stained glass windows that have a picture of a door without a doorknob and it is a reminder, not that you can't get through, but that God can always get through the door, the door of your heart, the doors

of your insecurity, the doors of your hopelessness, the doors of your frailty, the doors of fear, sadness, grief, and loss.

And when we realize that God is on both sides of any door, and God is with all people, we can enter the doors of the world with a joyful noise, with gladness, with singing, with thanksgiving, and with praise.

In a world that is beside itself with those who criticize, who harm, who want to have power over others, and destroy. Where social media and newsfeeds are cesspools of insensitivity and hatred. Where people are not given second chances or allowed to change but are judged on past mistakes even though they may have grown and learned from their mistakes, as human beings are supposed to do. We are called to be counter-cultural, to enter all doors of life knowing that God, who is loving and forgiving, who sees all of us as hurting, and in need of hope and the promise that we are not alone, knowing that God is with us. We are called to enter into the world making a joyful noise, with gladness, with singing.

It could be that our way of being in the world that values and finds joy, that loves and offers hope and forgiveness could change the course of history, if not for the world, maybe for our families, friends, and our communities.

May you walk in the world knowing that our God is good, faithful, kind, enduringly present. And may the Holy Spirit that lives and breathes in you be the light and life that others need to see and hear so that they too can be whole, transformed, loved and have the courage to walk through any door. Amen.