

CELEBRATE!

Ephesians 1; 15-23
Psalm 100

Faith Community
November 20, 2005

Introduction

Psalm 100 is one of the most loved Psalms because it is simple and profound. If you want to memorize a Psalm, this is a great one because it's short and it says a great deal. It gives us a condensed version of why we worship God so gladly. It says "Worship God joyfully! Here's why."

If our worship is less than joyful, maybe it's because we forget the reasons why we're here. If we don't sing at the top of our lungs, maybe we take it all for granted.

I

We worship because God made us, and we belong to God. There are two ways of looking at this belonging to God. One is that God owns us as a master owns slaves. We would have to do what he says. Maybe the master is even abusive. "I own you; do what I say!" There's that kind of belonging.

The second is just the opposite. It is, "You belong to this family." You come from us. As parents love a child through good and bad, so God loves us when we are lovable, and when we are not so much.

In God's family, no one is forced to do anything. We are allowed freedom and we take responsibility for our actions. God made us, so we belong to God. What better family could we belong to?

Being in God's family gives us the perspective to know what is right and wrong. We are taught to know what is good and what is crazy. The Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann, wrote of this Psalm, "Obviously, our world is at the edge of insanity, and we with it. Inhumaneness is developed as a scientific enterprise. Greed is celebrated as economic advance. Power runs unbridled to destructiveness. In a world like this one, our psalm is an act of sanity, whereby we may be re-clothed in our rightful minds."

Life is no longer self-grounded without thanks, but rooted in thanks. Life in God is life made whole. It is a life of thanks and celebration.

II

We celebrate because God is good, and God's love endures forever. The family we live in is one of compassion, trust, and care. The Bible sometimes talks of God as father. This is the model of what a father can be: an understanding, involved father. I think of the parents who sit at their child's side in the hospital. They are there when their child is awake, talking with him, asking what he needs. They are there when the child is asleep and resting, but always alert to what might happen. The father, whose job takes up so much of his time and who is often on the road, isn't thinking about work at all. He's cancelled trips and shut off his cell phone. He has only one concern right now.

The bible sometimes pictures God as a woman, as a mother holding her child, nourishing him and helping him through the tough times. This is enduring love, not now and then, not off and on. It isn't the love that is there when you are pleasing and gone when you aren't.

A chaplain has worked with an inmate for several months. The inmate heard a sermon and asked to talk to the chaplain. He changed his life completely. "I can't undo what I've done," he says. "I can't unhurt the people I have hurt, but maybe I can honor them by living differently."

"When I was at my very worst, God still loved me and cared about what happened to me. Everyone had given up on me, but God never did. Now I'm trying to make a difference. I'm trying to tell other people about this God who never drops you."

God's steadfast love endures forever.

III

We celebrate today because God is faithful. God can be trusted. We've all had friends that we could count on sometimes, and other times we couldn't. Haven't all of us had a friend we thought we could count on, but then something happens and they are angry, or some word is said to which they take offense, and suddenly it all falls apart.

Hasn't that happened to all of us at one time or another? It doesn't happen with God. There is nothing we can say or do that will cause God to stop loving us. God may deplore what we do, but God does not deplore us because God is faithful.

Friends may come and go, people may get upset over little things and go away, but God is faithful.

The Old Testament prophet Hosea lived a life that was an example of God's love. Most prophets teach God's word. Hosea lived as an example of God's love.

Hosea fell in love with a woman who was a prostitute. She also loved him. She gave up her work to marry him, and they lived happily together. But after a while, she went back to her old ways. She left Hosea to go back to life on the streets. Because he loved her so much, Hosea went back to find her and bring her home.

This story is an example of how much God loves us, and of how God brings us home. We rebel against God and go back to our old ways, but God comes searching for us. God's steadfast love endures forever.

Conclusion

That's why we gather here; we sing, we smile, and we celebrate because we are God's. The great God, who created all there is, cares about you and me. That's good news! We are in God's family. God is good and loves us forever. No matter what may happen, God will always care about you. The faithful love of God will last forever. So celebrate!

Amen