

“Make a Joyful Noise to the Lord, All the Earth!” (Psalm 100)

1. “If the church would praise God more,” a preacher once said, “the world would doubt Him less.” It’s an intriguing prospect, don’t you think? Our text, Psalm 100, praises the Lord. It invites God’s people to come into His presence with singing and enter His gates with thanksgiving, and it even calls upon all the earth to make a joyful noise to the Lord. What kind of impact do you suppose this had in the ancient world? What impact can this make on the world today?

In 2022, the Gallup Poll found that 81% of Americans say they believe in God, without further specification. Those who believe in the Triune God would not be as numerous. Eleven years earlier, in 2011, the portion of the U.S. population saying they believed in God came to 92%. In 2022 that was down to 81%. Among those aged 18 to 29, the figure in 2022 is 68%. All kinds of explanations can be given for this. The question lingers, though: what could happen if the church praised God more?

Picture a stately building in some other country, and out front of it an American flag blowing proudly in the breeze. This is a U.S. embassy, a little piece of America overseas. The ambassador there lives in the other country, but he remains a citizen of the United States, and he acts under the direction of the U.S. government. He represents the nation to which he belongs as he does his work in this foreign, maybe even hostile, land.

So it is for us who know by God-given faith that that Lord is God. Due to God’s grace we have come to know Him and love Him, or rather to be known by Him and loved by Him in a personal relationship (Gal. 4:9). We make a joyful noise to the Lord, and we invite the whole world to join in. Another psalm says, “Shout for joy to God, all the earth, sing the glory of His name; give to Him glorious praise! Say to God, ‘How awesome are your deeds!’” (Ps. 66:1-3a).

2. Speaking of other psalms, Psalm 100 caps off a series of short psalms that are all long on praise. Several of them begin with the simple but profound statement: “The Lord reigns” (Psalms 93, 97, and 99). How comforting it is, and how summoning of our praise, that the Lord – and not anyone else – is God!

It is He Who made us, Psalm 100 continues, and not we ourselves. The trouble is that, like everyone else in the world, we mix this up all the time. From our mothers’ wombs, we sing a song of self-praise that goes like this: “It is we ourselves who made us, not He.” We fix attention on ourselves, looking out for number one, thinking we know what’s best, forgetting about God because in our sin that is the way we want it. We desperately need the Lord to open our lips, for that is the only way that our mouths will declare His praise.

And He has done so. He has deigned to be our Shepherd. Another psalm says, “The Lord is my Shepherd” (Ps. 23:1). In the New Testament, Jesus clarified: “I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. . . . I lay down My life that I may take it up again” (John 10:11, 17). So He has made us *His* people, the sheep of *His* pasture. Picture the church as a flock of sheep safely sheltered with our Good Shepherd. “My sheep hear My voice,” said Jesus, “and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:27-28).

Martin Luther wrote of Psalm 100 that it is a prophecy of Christ. Apart from Jesus, how could the psalm be filled with all this exuberance: the spontaneous outburst of praise, the sound and the songs, the downright delight that the Lord is God, our God, reigning over us with a Shepherd’s care? Apart from Christ, how could sinners possibly have joy – genuine joy – in God? But with Christ, we give thanks to God and bless His name. “For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand” (Ps. 95:7).

3. So we “enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise.” We “come into His presence with singing” (Ps. 100:4, 2). This singing occurs literally when we join in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs at church or Bible class, or during devotions at home, or even driving down the street in a car.

Praise of God can take other forms, too, such as service. It can be expressed through a friendly attitude and a kind word for someone else. It can come through when we help others and do our level best to seek what is best for them. It can provide the strength for us to keep on keeping on, not growing weary of well-

doing. St. Paul wrote: “do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Col. 3:17).

An 85-year-old woman lay ill with what was thought to be her last sickness. When her pastor arrived at her bedside, he asked if there was any particular section of Scripture that she wanted him to read for her. The woman responded that she would leave it to the pastor to make the selection, as long as it was one of praise.

Our God has made some selections for us, placing us into various vocations in which we serve Him and our neighbors. Yet He has not always told us, in detail, what to do in every situation. So there is some selecting for us to do too. What if our selections of service were powered by praise, as we praise our good and gracious God? And what if we vocalized our praise, declaring the excellencies of the Savior Who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light? Jesus said: “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

4. This is not always easy, we have to admit. Our sinful flesh drags us down, away from the mind-set of praise and into a self-serving loop where we take the attitude that we don’t want to do anything for anyone else and we take the further attitude that we don’t want to praise God, either. Those attitudes are connected.

Then everything becomes a chore, and there always seems to be something to complain about. During World War II, sugar was rationed back here on the home front. In a restaurant one day a customer already had the amount of sugar he was supposed to get, but he wanted more. The man rather gruffly ordered additional sugar, only to hear the response: “Stir what you’ve got.”

Well, look at what you’ve got. Start right here, with Psalm 100. Stir with that. Let the psalm stir you, and before long you will be lifting your voice in praise all over again. If you don’t feel like praising God, do it anyway. Picture yourself among the throng of people who can come right into the presence of the high and holy God, doing so not with fear and trembling or tears and weeping but with a joyful noise and glad singing. For the Lord God is our strength and our song, and He has become our salvation. Because of Christ, we can go into the gates of heaven thanking God and into His courts praising Him.

Come what may, we can “serve the Lord with gladness,” as Psalm 100 says. “For the Lord is good.”

5. The Lord is good today, and He will be good tomorrow. “His steadfast love endures forever” (Ps. 100:5). These words may sound familiar as the refrain from Psalm 136, but they are here already in Psalm 100. The Lord is good, and His steadfast love endures forever. So give thanks to the Lord. Give thanks to Him and bless His name.

A farmer had grown dissatisfied with his farm. As he looked around, not one bit of it looked good to him anymore – not the house, the barn, the equipment, not even the land. So he got a real estate broker to put the place up for sale. The broker wanted to make sure he had written up a good description of the farm, so he made a phone call and read his little description to the farmer. But the farmer surprised him. *Repeat that*, the farmer said, *and this time read it slowly*. After hearing it again, the farmer said: “No, I’m not gonna sell. I have been looking for a place like this all my life.”

Praise resembles that phone call when it is dripping with the water and Word of your Baptism. It shows you how things really are. In Christ you have newness of life. The Lord’s faithfulness that endures to all generations is His faithfulness to you too. Let that sink in.

Then make a joyful noise. Let all the earth know that the Lord is God. It is He who made us, and we are His. With saving faith in the Good Shepherd, we Christians are His people, the sheep of His pasture. So we give thanks to Him and bless His name. For the Lord is good, and His steadfast love endures forever. On your own, you would never find a God like that — even if you looked for Him all your life. But He found you.

So make a joyful noise to the Lord. You’ll be amazed at how it echos.

The opening quotation and all illustrations above are from Guido A. Merkens, “Convention Sermon,” Convention Proceedings, 50th Regular Convention The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, New Orleans, Louisiana, July 6-13, 1973 (N.p., n.d.), 67-71.