

Scripture: Psalm 100:1-5

Sermon: God, Worship, and Us

Confession is a part of worship so I thought it might be helpful to model it for all of you this morning. I stand before you as a self-avowed whiny baby. For the last few weeks, I have been acting like a 2 year old who has missed her nap. I am not a diva, but I can be dramatic and I have been so dramatic recently that I expect an Oscar this year. So why is your practically perfect pastor in every way (**there something else to confess**) been acting like this? I can answer you in four words: **Covid-19 and today's scripture**. Yes, I know that is startling, even shocking, but stay with me and all will be revealed.

Like all of you I have tried to be a trooper during the pandemic. We stayed home during Sheltering Place and like most of you gained 10 pounds. I always wear my mask in public. To stay safe while working, I have learned more new technology in the last 8 months than any white haired women should ever have to learn. I have come so far that they even gave me a trophy at work.

Now I know my experience has been so much easier than most of yours. I do not live alone. There are not two people trying to work from home, while keeping their children occupied and home schooling them. So many people have struggled far more than me, but I have just hit the wall on this pandemic stuff.

And here is why: Covid-19 has taken so much away from us, but I am here to tell you that I am drawing a line in the sand. The pandemic is taking away our Thanksgivings at least the way we cherish it. I grew up with jam packed tables groaning with food and somewhere yelling, "Where's the second turkey." These day my granddaughter, Lily, helps me set what she calls a "fancy table" and Mr. Mike is in the kitchen cooking his heart out. But not this year. For the first time since my baby sister was born, we will not share a Thanksgiving table. My son, Matt, and granddaughter, Lily, will not be with us either. I imagine this coming Thursday like this. Mike and our son, Josh, and I will be eating deli turkey sandwiches with a pathetic slice of cranberry sauce on tv trays in front of the television. Can it get any worse?

Of course it can; **they are even putting the Macey's Thanksgiving parade online. Is nothing sacred?**

Part of my job description is to be a come off the bench preacher and preach whenever needed. Normally I love that part of my job until I read the lectionary scripture that Kipp and Bill choose for today. There are always 4, count 'em, lectionary choices, but did they pick one that would resonant with my whiny heart. No they picked a Psalm that talks about joy, singing, thanksgiving, and gratitude. You have already noticed that I am not feeling any of those things. Here is our reading from Psalm 100: 1-5

SCRIPTURE – PSALM 100:1-5 – New International Version

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

**² Worship the Lord with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.**

**³ Know that the Lord is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.**

**⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.**

**⁵ For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.**

Psalm 100:1-5 New International Version

What were Bill and Kipp thinking on the Sunday before what may be the worst Thanksgiving of our lives? **They were thinking this powerful passage is what we all need to hear today;** not just whiny babies like me. **They were thinking this most beloved psalm will gladden your heart and open your spirit to God. They were reminding us that worshiping God as the beloved community defines who we are and who God calls us to be in the very worst of times, even in these times.**

This psalm begins by inviting all of the earth to make a joyful noise to God. How can that be possible given the misery of this world and sometimes our lives? This psalm my friends is literally a call to revolution. Let all the earth rejoice in God, the Creator, in spite of pain, suffering, fear and death. Let us be glad in the presence of Christ, despite the discouragement, depression, confusion, and divisions in our country that may seem impossible to overcome. Let us raise our voices in thanksgiving in spite of poverty,

hunger, and disease. This psalm is telling us to look death in the eye and make a joyful noise because Jesus has overcome death forever.

How can we do these things? **Because God is still God.** Every single thing on this planet still belongs to God and always will. Today is not just the Sunday before Thanksgiving; today is the final Sunday of the Christian year: Christ the King Sunday. Today reminds us that **Jesus is our King and the Lord of this universe** and will one day return in all his glory. But there is one more thing we need to hear about Christ the King Sunday.

Some of you have heard this story, but some stories need to be told more than once. The oldest person I ever baptized was a lovely man in his 70's. As he put it, **"I have to learn as much as possible about Jesus because I don't have enough time left."** What a sweetheart. So he jumped into Disciple I bible study which is a study where you read 70% of the entire bible. Talk about jumping in the deep end. He loved Disciple, but one Sunday he came up to me and said, **"Pastor Sherry, I loved everything in Disciple at first, but now we are reading the prophets and every week it's the same story. The people get comfortable, they stray from God's path, God sends**

them a prophet to bring them back to their Lord, and sometimes really bad things happens. I am getting so depressed that I am thinking about dropping out of class.”

God wins not just in the end, but right here and now.

So this is what I told him and you today. **“Please don’t give up; I don’t want to spoil the ending, but God wins, not just in the end, but right here and now.**

And that is the God we are to worship, to sing joyful praises to, to offer our gratitude and thanksgiving. And most of all, that is the God we belong to. We are his people and the sheep of his pastures. How does a shepherd care for his flock? He knows their names and loves them. He provides green pastures and still waters. He guides and protects his flock and no matter what evil may come to them, the shepherd never deserts his flock, not even in the midst of a pandemic.

But here’s the thing. Belonging to God comes with a responsibility. We are to live our lives according to the way that Jesus taught and showed us to

live. And here comes something you already know: this Jesus life is not easy. But sometimes God sends you encouragement for the journey.

Last week in my Disciple class, we were discussing our own faith journey and how difficult it can be. One of the women in the class shared something so brilliant that I will never forget it. **For her, trying to live a faithful life was like being on a boat on the water.** When the storms comes and the waves grow high, if you are in a ski boat, you are going to get bounced around hard enough for bruises and maybe even tossed out of the boat. If you are in a canoe, paddle quickly for shore because those waves will flip you over in a heartbeat. And if you are on a raft, well pray for a life jacket because you are toast. But then she said, **“But a pontoon boat is different. It is big and it is steady and smooth on the water and no matter how high the waves, you will stay on course.”** I love that image and will never forget it. And I would add this to her story. **A pontoon boat also will hold a lot of people which brings us all the way back to worship**

We need worship like we need to breathe and when we cannot worship we long for it. Thanks to your financial support, our church can provide on-

line worship, back in the building worship for both traditional and contemporary worship. But despite the season, many of you are still attending our pop up or outdoor worship. Last Sunday I looked out of the kitchen window of the parsonage about halfway through outdoor worship and it was starting to sprinkle rain. I remember thinking well that's it for outdoor worship today. But I was wrong.

Butch Williams was at that service and reported when the first rain drops started to fall, lots of people jumped up and headed towards their cars. Were they leaving? No they had gone to get umbrellas so they continue to worship God together.

Those photos give a whole new meaning to pop-up worship.

Worship can be so many things, but sometimes worship is so profound that it changes us forever. Recently one of our 6-year old boys , Rucker, died after a long fight with cancer. I was honored to be asked to do a message for the children. We gathered in Dick Kelly Park in front of the cross. I didn't count but the crowd was huge, filling up the entire space and spilling over into the sides. Just as the service began I saw all those people there to celebrate

Rucker's life, to cry, to laugh, and remember what Rucker had taught us about courage and about God. And I just stopped and said, **"Look around, this is what Jesus meant when he told us to love each other as he had loved us."** It was the beloved community at its very best and it was holy ground that afternoon. I promise you the Spirit was so present with us that the air seemed to simmer.

There are so many moments I could share with you, but this is the one I want you to go home and it was very important that I used language that the children could understand. So I said this: Rucker's mommy and daddy took the very best care of him and the best doctors tried so hard to make Rucker well, but they couldn't. So do you know who made him well? And sitting right in front of me, Rucker's four year old brother, Charlie, said, **"No, who?"** Then I said, **"Jesus healed Rucker."** And my dear friends, he heals us too on both sides of the river and each and every day. And that is why:

We enter his gates with thanksgiving,

And his courts with praise.

We give thanks to him and bless his name.

For the Lord is good;

His steadfast love endures forever,

I don't about you, but I am going to put my whiny way aside and no matter who is or isn't around my Thanksgiving table with me this year. I am going to thank God for the blessings of worship and that I belong to King Jesus who will never let me go. I am also going to spend my time living like Jesus instead of complaining to him. I know this Thanksgiving is going to tough for all of us, but I am going to make a list of all the things I am grateful for and praise God for my many blessings. And one thing that I am so grateful for is a vaccine is coming soon and I trust and pray that next Thanksgiving everyone you love will be gathered around a table groaning with food, someone will say: **"Bring out the second turkey!"** In the name of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

