

Sermon for FPC Gardena – Sunday May 17, 2009

Psalm 100

Nursery School ‘Spring Sing’

Psalm 100 is a familiar prayer of praise and gratitude to God.

It is a song of joy!

It offers a concise summary of how we are to go about engaging in lives of worship—making a great teaching tool as we guide our children and grandchildren in the ways of loving and relating to God.

Psalm 100 can also serve as a reminder to us of those innate qualities in children that equip them so naturally for spontaneous worship.

And some of these overlap—reminding us of some important things about our relationships with God, which we can see reflected in our relationships with our children and grandchildren and other young people in our lives.

The first, and perhaps most foundational, of these elements is that of *belonging*. “It is God that made us and we belong to God. We are God’s people and the sheep of God’s pasture.”

Belonging to God does not mean that we are God's possessions, merely to be admired or utilized from time to time, nor to be imprisoned by a lack of freedom.

No. Belonging to God means that God created us; loves us; cares about even the smallest details of our lives; wants us to be the best we can be; enjoying the gifts of our lives.

This is a lesson which we can see reflected for the children in our lives. We delight in them; we take responsibility for their care; we offer guidance as they grow. We do our best to create and provide an environment for them which allows them to be safe from harm while enjoying freedom within boundaries—not unlike the shepherd caring for the sheep.

As we belong to God—residing deep in the heart of God's care,

in this way our children belong to us—

and so they learn firsthand, through the love of their parents and grandparents, the security and serenity that comes with belonging to God.

Secure in God's constant love, we are free to relate to God, to engage in *worship*. Psalm 100 suggests that this is done by making a joyful noise, with gladness, and with singing. It also involves giving thanks and praise to God, blessing God's name.

We teach our children to '*make a joyful noise to God*' in many ways...

By taking them to church regularly so they can engage in worship,

By singing or humming or playing songs of praise and joy,

By modeling the joyful attitudes, actions, and language that reflect our gratitude to and love for God.

Yet this is also something that we can learn from the children in our lives. For they are natural worshippers! Children cannot help but '*make a joyful noise to the Lord!*' One of the great joys of having my office so close to the preschool is hearing the shouts of laughter that permeate the air each morning as the children play and learn and grow. They may not name it as such, but as God observes our children running and laughing and playing together, enjoying the beauty of the world around them.....surely God recognizes these things as prayers of joy.

When the Psalm calls us to ‘*Enter God’s gates with thanksgiving*’ it is calling us to expressions of gratitude. *Gratitude* also comes naturally to children. They appreciate the simplest things—the cold surprise of an ice cream cone,

the splash of the waves along the shore,

the energy of a furry puppy as it wags its tail,

a word of encouragement or praise.

God surely recognizes their prayers of gratitude as expressed in their smiles, their wiggles, their laughter, and their irrepressible joy.

We can also model gratitude to God for our children in many ways—

By expressing thankfulness for the gifts that God showers us with each and every day;

By creating opportunities for family prayers of thanksgiving;

By serving others and sharing what we have with those less fortunate than we are.

As our children naturally express the joy in and gratitude for God’s loving creation, and as they learn about God’s love through the love of their parents, grandparents, teachers, and others, they will surely come to an understanding of God’s goodness as described in the 100th Psalm... “For the Lord is good.”

This becomes a perpetual cycle—God’s constant and abiding love in our lives and the lives of our children prompts us to expressions of joy, gratitude, and praise. Children learn to understand that these are ways to worship God—to communicate with God, to be in relationship with God.

As they—and we—practice and learn to make regular worship, with prayers of joy and thanksgiving, a consistent part of our lives, we will all become more aware of God’s presence, God’s goodness, and God’s love. The Psalm assures us that “God’s steadfast love endures forever.” That is the truth that we want them to know and believe and carry deep in their hearts. “God’s steadfast love endures forever.” That is the Good News that we want them to express with joy and thanksgiving and growing faith.

Listen carefully this morning, as the children sing and ‘make a joyful noise’. You will hear in their singing, and see on their faces, expressions of their joy, their gratitude, and their faith.

May we learn from their example, and allow our lives to be ‘a joyful noise’ to the glory of our loving God. Amen.

Psalm 100

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come into God's presence with singing. Know that the LORD is God. It is God that made us, and we belong to God; we are God's people, and the sheep of God's pasture. Enter God's gates with thanksgiving, and God's courts with praise. Give thanks to God, bless God's name. For the LORD is good; God's steadfast love endures forever, and God's faithfulness to all generations.