

“Getting a Charge Out of Worship!”

Sermon Series: “Recharging Your Spiritual Batteries”

February 21, 2010

Psalm 100

This morning I’m beginning a 4 week sermon series entitled, “Recharging Your Spiritual Batteries.” That doesn’t sound like an appropriate sermon series for Lent, does it? that’s too upbeat for Lent, isn’t it? Lent after all, is about scaling down, not charging up. It’s about self-denial, not self-enhancement. Lent is about taking something out of our lives, not adding something to our lives. Not really. Lent is about drawing near to God, enhancing our relationship with God, recharging our spiritual batteries. Lent is a time to give extra attention to our relationship with our Creator. It’s a time to devote ourselves to the Spiritual Disciplines of our faith.

What I want us to do is reexamine the classic ways that Christians renew their spirituality. The most central of all is our subject for today, worship. Worship is the center of the church’s life. We are most the church when we are in worship.

Everything we do flows out of worship.

- we love others because we experience a God of love when we worship.
- we seek to make the world more just and fair for all, because the God we encounter in worship is just, kind and compassionate to all.
- we seek to love our neighbor and each other because the God we meet in worship fills us with divine love and compels to love others.

The church’s life flows out of worship. Worship is the center of the Church’s life. Worship is also the center of a Christian’s life. You know the phrase, a “practicing Catholic,” a “practicing Jew”? It means one who participates in the rites and rituals of their faith. It means one who worships, and one who specifically worships with a community of like-minded God-seekers. We need to make popular the phrase, “A Practicing Protestant.” A Practicing Protestant is one who worships in a community of faith.

That's the distinction you know between spirituality and religion. It's popular to say, *"I'm spiritual but I'm not religious."* To which I always want to reply, *"We're spiritual too! At least we're trying to be! We Churchgoers are trying to be both."* To be religious is simply to live out one's spirituality with others. Religious people gather with others to practice spirituality together - to experience God together.

The collection of Psalms in our Bibles make this point 150 times. I say that because there are 150 psalms in the collection. This collection was the hymnal and prayer book of the Israelites. This is what they said before God together. In fact, when they collected the books of the Old Testament and put them in an order that made sense, they put the Psalms smack dab in the middle of them all - to underscore their importance and the centrality of worship for the Jews. Our spiritual ancestors gathered together for worship to practice their spirituality and to experience the God of their lives together as a community of faith.

Psalms 100 is one of the more well known of the Psalms. Ministers use it often as a call to worship - *"Make a Joyful Noise unto the Lord! Worship the Lord with gladness. Come into his presence with singing!"* Psalm 100 is not only a great call to worship, it's also a great teacher of what worship is. In fact, all we really need is the first line of the first verse. We're going to walk through this one verse and you'll see that practically everything we need to know about worship is in there.

"Make a Joyful Noise unto the Lord!"

I. "MAKE a Joyful Noise unto the Lord!"

He's saying, "Respond to God! Say Something!"

- respond to the God who has called us by name.
- respond to the God who has called you by name.
- reach out to the God who has reached out to us.

You probably know that the first 5 books of the Bible are called the Books of Moses and also the Torah - the laws of God, the ways of God, the will of God that God had revealed to the Israelites. Five books of God addressing the Israelites. They treasured the fact that of all the peoples of the world, the God of the Universe has chosen them for the revelation of God's character and will.

God has spoken to them through the teachings that are found in the Torah, the first 5 books of the Bible.

Well, when they collected the Psalms, they took the 150 psalms and grouped them into five books.

Book I is Psalms 1-41.

Book II is Psalm 42 -72

Book II is 73-89

Then it goes 90-106, then 106-150.

Five books of prayers and songs to God. It parallels or mirrors the first five books of the Bible. The point is this:

The Torah is 5 books of God speaking to the Jews.

- 5 books of God explaining God's ways.

- 5 books of God addressing the Israelites.

The 5 books of the Psalms is their response to God. This is what they said, sung and prayed in response to what God has said to them. One of my favorites books on the Psalms is by Eugene Peterson. It's called Answering God.

God spoke. The Jews answered. They responded. God said, "You're my people. I'm your God." The psalms are the language they used to respond to God's invitation. "Make a Joyful Noise unto the Lord" is simply a call to "Respond to the God who has spoken to us."

Many years ago I was having a very trite, petty moment where I was complaining to a friend about someone who worked at the church. This staff member was a great, great guy, but he had a habit of repeating himself incessantly. So I said to my friend, "This staff member says the same thing over and over to me, as if he thinks I didn't get it the first time." A few weeks later all three of us were together. And the staff member repeated himself several times. Later during a private moment, the friend that I had complained to said this to me - "*Rich, do you know why he repeats himself?*" "*No, why?*" "*Because you don't say anything back to him. He made a statement to you, and you didn't respond, and so he said it again. And again you said nothing to him, and so he said it again. You gotta say something!!*" You know, I tried that and it worked.

God has spoken to us again and again - through Creation, through the scriptures, through the person of Christ. We need to say something! We need to respond to God's call. Worship is our response.

“Make a Joyful Noise unto the Lord.” “Say something to the God who has spoken to us!” Make a Joyful Noise unto the Lord.

II. “Make a Joyful Noise unto the Lord! Worship the Lord with gladness.”

Isn't that great that the words "Joy" and "Gladness" are there? Worship should be a delightful experience. There should be joy in our gatherings. A came across a surprising quote from a Puritan preacher named Stephen Charnock. He wrote, *“The more joyful a service is, the more spiritual it is.”* That's pretty good for a Puritan, isn't it? Of course they're weren't as solemn and serious as they're always portrayed. In fact during the Great Awakening they sometimes even danced before the Lord with great joy. *“The more joyful a service is, the more spiritual it is,”* because the joy comes from the awareness that we are in the presence of God.

There was a wonderful guy at my first church named Butch. Butch was a school teacher, but before he went into teaching he played some professional football. Well, one day Butch called me up and wanted to talk right away. Butch was not someone you said no to! He only came to church Christmas & Easter, but we always had a really nice relationship when I did see him. He came into my office and starting telling me that he had just lost a dear friend, and that his friend had had the most wonderful funeral he had ever been to. In fact, Butch said his friend's funeral was the best church service he'd ever been to! (that hurt a little bit, because he'd been to our best services! - Christmas & Easter. But you see, Butch's friend was African American and the service was at his church. Butch said there was, *“so much joy, so much faith, so much love. It was amazing!!”*

And if you've ever been to a Black Gospel Church you know exactly what he's talking about. There is great joy, great celebration. Our Sisters and Brothers worship the Lord with gladness, because they believe that God is in The House! My friend Butch had been in the midst of people making a joyful noise to the Lord. And it was intimate and sincere, loving and joyful. Friends, where there is an awareness of God, there is joy.

In the First Century, St. Paul wrote a letter to the Christians at a town known as Galatia. He wrote about what he called *“The Fruit of the Spirit.”* *The Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness and self-control.* The “fruit” of the Spirit means the result of the Holy Spirit, the result of the Holy Spirit filling our lives. And so there will be more love in our hearts. That makes sense. The fruit of the Holy Spirit in

our lives will be gentleness, kindness, patience, etc. But isn't it telling that after love then second thing he mentions is joy? Where the Spirit is there is joy. Where God is there is joy.

So if worship is becoming open to God's presence and responding to the God who is in our midst and in our hearts, then worship ought to be marked by joy. *Make a Joyful Noise unto the Lord.*

III. Let's think about that next word, Noise. Make a Joyful Noise unto the Lord. I believe that this verse is teaching us that our response to God doesn't have to be perfect "*Make a Joyful Noise.*" You might think that your response to God is just noise, but make it a joyful noise and God will be pleased! We don't have to sing like angels to respond to God.

Several years ago I was going through some of my Mother's things (she died in 1983). I came across a box of things she had saved through the years. Among the items in this box was a red ceramic heart that I had made in elementary school for my mother. It had been made from clay in art class. I was about 8 years old when I made this heart. Do you think it was shaped perfectly? Do you think it had some rough edges? It sure did. My little hands couldn't get it perfectly smooth. Nor were the two wings of the heart symmetrical. It obviously wasn't a great piece of art. So why did she keep it all those years? You know it was because she knew it was an expression of my love for her. It didn't have to be perfect. It said all it needed to say.

Worship is like that. It doesn't have to be perfect. You don't have to sing like Pavirotti or Celine Dion. You don't have to pray prayers that sound like they should be instantly printed in the Anglican Book of Prayer. You might wander off and daydream during a prayer. You might fall asleep and drop your hymnal in the middle of a prayer. God's not thrown off by that. Through the years I've seen people get up to read a scripture, and some folks when they make a mistake they feel awful about it. And I always want to say, "*We're not here to be perfect. We're here to honor God as best we can.*" We're here to practice our spirituality, and sometimes we get it right and others times not so much, but God is still honored. I don't have to preach like Billy Graham or St. Paul to convey God's truth. Our worship doesn't have to be perfect. We simply need to express our love to God. God wants our hearts. God wants our love. God wants us to respond to the invitation to be God's people. "*Make a Joyful Noise unto the LORD.*"

IV. This last part is very personal. Make a joyful noise unto the LORD. Worship is a communal event, but let it also be a very personal, intimate experience between you and God. Make a joyful noise Unto The LORD. I'll close with this story.

A family had just welcomed a little baby boy into the family. This little baby had a big sister who was four. She loved being a big sister and was very good at it. One night when the baby was in his crib the little girl asked her parents if she could have some time alone with her baby brother. The parents were somewhat nervous about this - leaving her alone with this newborn baby but they knew their daughter truly cared about her little brother. Still they stood just outside the door and peaked in from time to time just to be sure. And as they were standing there they overheard their daughter saying this to her little brother, *"Tell me about God. I'm starting to forget."*

As human beings we tend to forget.
Worship helps us remember.
Worship helps us remember and respond.
Think about it. Let's pray about it.