

**Sermon: O Be Joyful!**  
**Scripture: Psalm 100**  
**Speaker: Pastor Phil Thengvall**  
**Date: November 27, 2005**

It is here, the time of the year when we have to guess what Christmas gift will please that special person most and hope we get it right. "Do you think they will like it?" is the question of the season. You don't want to hear how you missed the "clues" that were left, the "suggestions" you inadvertently forgot. Hopefully the number one person in your life has given you very specific, helpful ideas, like mine has, so the guessing is removed, and the pressure is off. Christmas is so much merrier if everyone is pleased with the gifts you gave.

Thankfully, when it comes to finding out what kind of gift pleases God we are not left in the dark. Even in the area of worship he has given us clear instruction throughout scripture. Worship is bringing God a gift of praise, telling God how wonderful he is. It is also telling others how great he is. Psalm 100 tells us **how** God likes us to worship him, and **why** we should worship him.

Let's stand together and read it in unison:

**Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.**

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

**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.**

**Enter his gates with thanksgiving  
 and his courts with praise;**

**give thanks to him and praise his name.**

**For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;**

**his faithfulness continues through all generations.**

**1. How are we to worship God? Our worship is to be:**

- **Wonderfully noisy (vs. 1) Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.**

Am I guilty of using an oxymoron here? For some of you, wonderful and noisy don't go together, especially if we are talking about worship. If worship is to be wonderful, it cannot be noisy. You do not believe church is a place for noise.

What is noise? According to a New Jersey Noise Ordinance Commission:

NOISE - Any sound which annoys or disturbs humans or which causes or tends to cause an adverse psychological or physiological effect on humans. (South Plainfield, NJ, Noise Ordinance)

For some of you *wonderfully noisy* would be okay if we were describing a family gathering on Thanksgiving Day, or a weekly session of the local women's auxiliary, but not Sunday morning at church.

For others here today this is an apt description of what you believe authentic worship is, and you wish our worship was noisier than it is. Welcome to the church of 2005, where Christians cannot agree on what worship should look like or sound like or feel like.

Maybe it is time for a vote. Is our worship too noisy? or not noisy enough? That is the question. Unlike a church near Madrid Spain, our church will probably not be cited for exceeding legal decibel levels on a Sunday morning.

The following account was written up in a Spanish newspaper:

The music and singing of Pizarrales Evangelical Church has led to complaints by neighbors, and the case is currently under consideration by the Town Council. In March, police called at the church after receiving complaints from the neighbor who lives over the church. Having taken acoustic measurements, they found that the noise level exceeded the 5.6 decibels permitted in daytime. Now the Council has to decide what action, if any, to take. However, it seems that the authorities have one rule for churches, another for bars and discotheques, which pump out far more noise, especially at weekends.

< Source: El Adelanto de Salamanca. Editing: ACPress.net >

Closer to home, the Lake Edge, UCC, in Madison, WI has a contemporary worship service called:

### **The Noisy Worship Thing**

According to the church's website, "It's a worship service that frames a window to God with noisy praise and gospel music that is sing-able and moving."

Before we turn this into an open discussion on worship preferences, let's go back to the text. This psalm is not suggesting what your worship style or my worship style should be; instead it is describing the kind of worship God desires. God is letting us know how we should worship him; God is telling us the kind of worship he loves. In this particular psalm he tells us to shout joyfully.

Other psalms ask us to praise him with musical instruments, with the harp (a more subdued voice) and the resounding cymbal (a loud crashing noise). We are also commanded in the scriptures to be silent before God, in awe of his majesty and sovereignty. The prophet Habakkuk said, "The Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silent before him." God doesn't have a preferred style; he wants our worship to be exuberant sometimes, and more subdued at other times. But most important, he wants our worship to be sincere, heart-felt.

You may be more comfortable with quiet expressions of worship, or with louder expressions, based on who you are, and your background and experience. We all have preferred styles of worship.

This psalm challenges some of us because we are more inhibited, and self-conscious when it comes to public worship. We are concerned about what we look like and what others will think of us. In church we tend to be more cerebral, and less emotional; while at a sporting event we can shed the inhibitions and not care what others think. I believe the psalmist is asking us to shed some of our inhibitions and get a little noisy in a wonderful way as we worship God.

What else do we learn about how we are to praise and worship the Lord?

## **2. How are we to worship God? Our worship is to be:**

- **Overwhelmingly happy (vs. 2) Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.**

God desires happy worshippers; our hearts are to be filled with gladness and joy as we sing to God in worship. When was the last time you were overwhelmingly happy? If you are a K-State football fan, it

may have been a week ago Saturday when the Wildcats defeated the Tigers in a come-from-behind victory in Manhattan. Sunday's Eagle carried the following comments on the front page:

**"Bill Snyder yanked off his headset for the last time with 46 seconds remaining in Saturday's game, around the same time a couple of his players conspired to dump a cooler of Gatorade on him.**

**It's too cold for that, a Kansas State official warned the players.**

**They'd have to celebrate the Wildcats' 36-28 victory against visiting Missouri -- a victory that ushered the K-State coach into retirement a winner -- in the same manner as the rest of the 46,039 in attendance at the newly named Bill Snyder Family Stadium: Through a standing ovation; By chanting his name: With tears: And, in the end, by carrying him off the field.**

**It was another emotional day in the Little Apple, a farewell to Snyder. Judging from the signs scattered throughout the stadium, Saturday was about showing appreciation for the man who transformed Kansas State football into a national force."**

That is what last Saturday in Manhattan, KS was about. What should Sunday be about? Isn't it about "showing appreciation for the one who transformed" us from being dead in trespasses and sins to being alive in Christ? How do we show our appreciation? We do it with joyful songs, with gladness in our hearts, so the one who looks at our hearts sees our gladness and joy.

Gladness begins in the heart and comes out in songs, in clapping, in raised hands, in many different ways.

Worship is work; it is giving something to God, bringing him an offering, serving him. The NIV says, "Worship (but serve is a more accurate translation) the Lord with gladness." But sometimes when we gather for worship we don't feel very joyful, it's been a hard week. We come with an Eeyore attitude (Winnie the Pooh):

"O-o-h, I love and worship you, but things are pretty bad today, and they may get worse, so I am not really into this worship thing this morning." Put yourself into the Lord's place when he has to listen to that, and respond to that attitude.

Or imagine being in a fine, upscale restaurant and having someone come to your table, looking hangdog and dejected and saying:

Hi, my name is George, and I will be taking care of you. I know you deserve the very best of service tonight, and although it is my honor and privilege to serve you, it's been a terrible day, so please don't expect a lot from me. I am exhausted, dead-dog tired. I would rather be anywhere but here, but since I am here, I will try to make the best of it. What can I bring you to drink?"

This is often what the loving Lord hears from us. There is no joy, no gladness in our serving. We need to remember that we are here for him, he is the audience, we are the servers. Do we serve him with joy; with overwhelming joy? One thing that can help us to be more joy-filled in worship is to get our eyes off of ourselves and on to God. God is the audience, the one who is listening to and receiving the service of our worship. Verse 4 places our focus where it needs to be.

### **3. How are we to worship God? Our worship is to be: totally focused on God.**

Look again at the psalm:

Shout for joy **to the LORD**, all the earth.

Worship **the LORD** with gladness;

Come **before him** with joyful songs.

Enter **his gates** with thanksgiving

And **his courts** with praise;

Give thanks **to him** and praise **his name**.

The lack of joy we experience in worship is often times due to having wrong expectations. We come into worship expecting, maybe even demanding a certain kind of experience so that **our** needs are met. We think, "I could sure use a good worship time this morning." Although we are the sheep, we act like we are in charge; that it is all about us. How often do we leave church on Sunday and evaluate the worship service in terms of what we got out of it? Do we ever ask "I wonder if God was pleased, if my worship was something he could receive, if I gave him my best this morning?" I don't mean to imply that we shouldn't come with hungry hearts to be refreshed by the Lord, and fed by his Word. But that will occur more often if we are less self-focused and more God-focused. It is in serving Him that our needs are met, it is when we bless Him that he blesses us.

For me corporate worship that is wonderfully noisy, overwhelmingly joyful, and totally focused on God happens when I attend a Promise Keeper Event. I have been to six of them, in Colorado, Texas, Oklahoma, and in Georgia. It is hard to select the best one, they have all been exceptional.

But probably being with 40,000 pastors in the Georgia Dome in Atlanta would have to be the high point. For me it seemed like a sample of what worship will be like in heaven. We served God as we shouted, as we sang, as we cried, and as we clapped. Sometimes we were silent before him. We were admonished and blessed by God's word. As we concluded we were humbled by his grace. It was wonderful. But is that the only venue in which Psalm 100 worship can occur? No, of course not. When my heart is right, God receives my worship and in turn blesses me, whether here at First Free, or elsewhere, in large or small groups. Why doesn't it happen every Sunday? Because I do not prepare myself for the service, the work of worship. God is here every Sunday, but I don't come in the right spirit every Sunday. The remaining verses of Psalm 100 can help us to prepare for worship. They tell us several things about God, giving us reasons why we should worship Him.

### **1. Why are we to worship God? We worship God because we know with complete confidence: Who God is, "Know that the Lord is God"**

We worship the God who has let us know him. God has revealed himself to us, otherwise we could not know him. This knowledge goes beyond mere head knowledge of certain facts. It is experiential knowledge, knowledge that implies relationship, indicates a familiarity with, an intimate understanding of someone. What we know is that He alone is God, the Lord Himself is God. He has no rivals, no competitors in his class, no equal. He is the only one with authority over all things; no one else has the expanse of his authority.

The scriptures are filled with verses that tell us the Lord is God.

David asks, "**For who is God besides the LORD?" (Psalm 18:31)**

God said to Moses, "**See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me.**" (Deut 32:39)

Moses told the Israelites, **“Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other.” (Deut. 4:39)**

As our Supreme Ruler, God is jealous of our complete devotion, and will not tolerate any rivals. This was made clear in the first commandment, **“You shall have no other god’s before me.”** To violate this is to commit spiritual adultery, a sin which eventually led to the captivity of the northern tribes and their eventual extinction.

**We worship the Lord because we know with complete confidence that He is God.**

**2. We worship God because we know with complete confidence: from where we come, “It is he who made us”**

In this time of confusion regarding the origin of all things it is so comforting to know that God made us. The Scripture says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...so God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.”

This understanding of divine origins is not held by many today. Some people live as if they made themselves; we say, “She is a self-made woman, he is a self-made man.” And these people adore their supposed creators.

We as Christians, however, know that God made us and take no credit to ourselves.

However, the psalmist is not only speaking here of God’s creation of the physical world, but of God’s sovereign act of choosing Israel as his own possession. It brings to mind their salvation history, including deliverance from slavery in Egypt, the covenant relationship initiated at Mt. Sinai, safety while they wandered in the wilderness, and eventually being settled in the land of Promise. As their Shepherd he chose them, rescued, led, fed, pastured, and protected them.

The apostle Paul places this same Biblical truth into a NT perspective in Ephesians 1:3-8 Turn and follow along in your Bible,

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.*

God chose us in Christ before we were formed in our mother’s womb? He didn’t line us up and pick the best looking, the smartest, and the richest. I remember being a boy in school waiting with a group of other boys until the captains chose the members of their respective teams. I was not an excellent athlete then, nor was I very big, so my name was never called first for either team. Sometimes a buddy of mine was chosen first or second and then he would put pressure on the captain to include me. Despite this pressure, many times I was one of the last two to be chosen. I still remember how I felt, like I wanted to disappear.

Jesus said, **“You did not choose me, but I chose you...”** John 15:16

We worship God because we know where we come from, and whose team we are on.

**3. We worship God because we know with complete confidence: to whom we belong, “We are his”. We belong to somebody!!**

We as human beings have a strong need to belong. According to an article published by the Department of Psychology, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio: “Existing evidence supports the hypothesis that the need to belong is a powerful, fundamental, and extremely pervasive motivation. Belongingness appears to have multiple and strong effects on emotional patterns and on cognitive processes. Lack of attachments is linked to a variety of ill effects on health, adjustment, and well-being.”

This strong need to belong expresses itself in some positive ways, such as:

- Devotion to family
- Loyalty to job, work
- Involvement in support groups
- Becoming the fan of a team

It is easy to feel like you belong in Nebraska, just find something red to wear. In fact there is no better time to purchase red stuff in Nebraska, it's all on sale! Our daughter-in-law moved from Austin, TX, to Omaha with our son this summer. Austin is a college town, home of the University of Texas (Hook-em Horns), and so I did not think she would notice a big difference. But her eyes were opened on Saturday, September 3, for the first football game of the season. She said, “Everyone was wearing red, all over town. These folks are weird, just plain crazy!”

All of us want to be part of a group, to be loved and appreciated by others, to be part of something bigger than ourselves. We see people searching for this all the time, trying by the way they dress, the words they use, the credentials they seek, to become a part of a group.

Is it wrong for us to feel this way? Is it wrong for us to want to belong? No. This desire to belong is a basic human need, an expression of our humanity. I believe God made each of us with a need to be loved by him, and until we accept his love, that need goes unmet.

Blaise Pascal - French mathematician, philosopher and physicist, 1623-1662 said:

**“There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus”**

**We belong to God.** He says in Isaiah 49:15, 16

**“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast?**

**And have no compassion on the child she has borne?**

**Though she may forget,**

**I will not forget you!**

**See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;”**

**We worship God because we belong to him.**

**4. We worship God because we know with complete confidence: How special we are to him, “We are his people, the sheep of his pasture”.**

Sheep have two things in common, they are all followers, and they all need a shepherd. I heard about a Far Side birthday card that illustrates this point about the nature of sheep. It shows a bunch of sheep at a cocktail party. A "man" and "woman" sheep are sitting and talking. He says to her, "Well, what do you

know--I'm a follower too." Inside it says, "Have a happy birthday, I mean, if everybody else thinks you should."

The Lord is our Shepherd, and in John 10 he describes what he does for us in terms of our identity, safety, and security. Begin in vs. 10

*"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.*

When we speak of being sheep with a good shepherd, our minds go automatically to Psalm 23.

It is hard to improve on the old KJV, but this original translation by Ron Allen, a professor at Western Seminary is excellent.

"*Yahweh* is my shepherd,  
I do not lack.  
In verdant pastures he causes me to lie down;  
By waters of quietness he gently leads me.  
He refreshes my being;  
He leads me in well-worn paths of righteousness  
For His name's sake.  
Even if I were to walk through a valley of deep darkness,  
I will not fear evil; for you are with me;  
Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.  
You arrange before me a table in the presence of my enemies;  
You anoint with oil my head;  
My cup is overflowing.  
Surely goodness and loyal love will pursue me all the days of my life,  
And I will dwell in the house of *Yahweh* forever."

How much does God love us? So much he died for us, gave his life for us, we are very special to him. **We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.**

When our three sons were born, my Dad told me that having grandchildren was so much fun; he wished he could have started with them. Now, a grandparent myself, I can agree with him. I love being a grandfather to our eight grand children! Since seven of the eight are boys, I get lots of attention, and have lots of requests to fill. It makes me feel special when they want me to read a book, play ball, build with blocks, put the train back on the track, come outside, etc. I feel so special when they want me to sit by them at the table when it is time to eat. "I want Bubba to sit by me!" If one of them calls on the phone and Dotty answers, it warms my heart to hear them ask, "Where is Pop-Pop?" or "Can I say 'Hi' to Bubba?" When 2 yr. old grandson Henry comes to visit Dotty, it doesn't take long before he is looking around the house and going "Pop-Pop?" I feel so special, so loved, so blessed.

Doesn't it just blow your mind that we are **even more special to God!**

This brings us to the final verse of our psalm and three more reasons we worship God.

**5. We worship God because we know with complete confidence: How good He is to us, “*The Lord is good*”.**

What do we mean when we say that the Lord, or God, is good? Good is a very broad term, but we definitely mean that God is morally perfect, and gloriously generous. We also mean that all he does is excellent, above any standard man would have for goodness. We define goodness in terms of God, not the opposite. God, and God alone, is good without qualification.

It is when we walk through a dark valley that we may question whether or not God is good. As a pastor for over 30 years, I have had the privilege to walk with many, many people in very dark, deep valleys and watch the active goodness of our Shepherd, caring for his sheep. I have walked with those who have experienced the death of children who were still born, who were just a few hours old when they died in their parents arms, whose child died of SIDS while they worked the night shift, whose child was killed while riding a tricycle.

I have cried with those who spouses or children took their own lives, with those who watched their spouse die of cancer and other chronic illnesses. I have counseled couples on the brink of divorce because of infidelity, drug addiction, or financial ruin.

I have led support groups for victims of abuse, and for those whose lives have been devastated by drug and alcohol addictions.

A common thread runs through all of these and many more stories. They tell me that the Good Shepherd did not abandon his sheep, but protected them, guided them, and delivered them. Never once did it occur to me that God was not good. Never once. I can confidently affirm, and encourage you to join me in affirming that the Lord is good. We worship him because he is good. God is so good.

**6. We also worship God because we know with complete confidence: How much He loves us, “*His love endures forever*”.**

God is a loving shepherd, and his love is loyal, very focused, purposeful, and intimate. And, he never quits loving us, “His love endures forever.” In the scriptures, when our Shepherd-God wants to get a point across to us sheep, who can be dense at times, he repeats it. Turn with me to Psalm 136. Read with me (NIV) the first three verses.

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.

*His love endures forever.*

Give thanks to the God of gods.

*His love endures forever.*

Give thanks to the Lord of lords:

*His love endures forever.*

As you glance at all 26 verses a pattern begins to emerge here. What is the point? God’s love never ends, because God is love. And God is everlasting. How does God let us know we are loved? Of course the death of his Son for our sins is the preeminent display of his love. But he also expresses his love to us through our sisters and brothers in Christ, through acts of kindness done by the body of Christ, the church. The folks I have been privileged to walk alongside that I mentioned earlier were often overwhelmed by the love God showered on them through his family. Many of you have either been recipients of this love, or been those who passed the love of God on to others.

Sometimes love can best be expressed by a hug. When my first wife was diagnosed with a growth in her brain she underwent a seven-hour surgery. I was in seminary and several fellow students joined me at the hospital for portions of the day. About six hours into the surgery we went to a hospital chapel for prayer. As we prayed I began to cry, and Nate, who could have been an NFL linebacker put his arms around me and I was swallowed up in a wonderful hug. I felt like God had his big arms around me, I felt so loved by God, through Nate. We worship God because his love endures forever.

Finally,

**7. We worship God because we know with complete confidence: How faithful He is, “*His faithfulness continues through all generations*”.**

I am reminded of what Joshua said after years of being tutored by Moses, and then leading Israel into the land of promise.

Just before he died he made this amazing and wonderful observation: **“Now I am about to go the way of all the earth.**

**You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed.”** (Joshua 23:14)

We worship God because he is faithful, trustworthy. He is not fickle or faithless; he doesn’t change his mind. His word is absolutely dependable, you can bank on it. We can look back over 4000 years now and see that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob kept his word to his people. He is our God too, and we can trust him to remain faithful into our future, and forever. This promise is good for our children, and our grandchildren, and their children and grandchildren, throughout all generations. From everlasting to everlasting he is God. Not just through our life but into eternity itself, his character and nature will not change. He will remain Good, Loving, and Faithful; our Shepherd will stay with us and will never abandon his sheep, nor forsake his people. The prophet Isaiah said in 40:10,11

**“See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power,  
and his arm rules for him.  
See, his reward is with him,  
and his recompense accompanies him.  
He tends his flock like a shepherd:  
He gathers the lambs in his arms  
and carries them close to his heart;  
he gently leads those that have young.**

Is our worship fitting for our God? Is God pleased with the gift, the service of worship we bring? That is the question we must ask ourselves. We have been challenged by God himself today, invited, no, commanded to worship in a wonderfully noisy manner, with overwhelming happiness in our hearts, and with our focus totally on God, and not on ourselves. This is necessary because of who the Lord is: the Lord is God; he is our maker, our redeemer, our shepherd. He is always good, always loving, and always faithful.

Our worship will never be what it should be until we are in heaven, but we can always make changes in our attitude, in our understanding, so our worship is not static, but moving in the right direction, toward being more kind the worship God desires, the worship that he deserves.

As we did earlier, stand with me as we read Psalm 100 again in unison:

**Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.**

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

**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.**

**Enter his gates with thanksgiving  
and his courts with praise;**

**give thanks to him and praise his name.**

**For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;**

**his faithfulness continues through all generations.**