

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Psalms 100:1-5 (ESV) ¹*Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!* ²*Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!* ³*Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.* ⁴*Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!* ⁵*For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.*

A favorite Christian author of mine, Joyce Landorf Heatherley, dropped out of attending church for a season. Her father was a pastor, so she had lived a large part of her life in the church serving in as many roles as possible. Being away from the gathering of church for several months she truly began to miss it; I guess absence can make the heart grow fonder. She writes, "I missed church so bad that I even missed hearing the coins make their noises as they were put into the offering plates." She missed church so bad that she even missed the offerings. I do not find that hard to believe because each of us holds very near and dear something in the worship service that touches a very sensitive part of our lives, one's very soul. Where I served previously in Mt. Olive, we had an exceptional Good Friday service. It was the first time I had ever done it, the same one we do here. Being the first time, all of us got caught up into the service and yes, it was so moving. You could sense God's Presence truly messing with us during the service. God was in our face, so to speak, convincing us that what the Bible tells us of Jesus' experience happened just as the Bible said it did. It was as if we were all hearing the story of the trials, scourging, and crucifixion for the first time. When I made the loud sound when the rock sealed the tomb, people did not jump out of their seats, but almost. The noise was super loud, and no one knew it was coming.

When I was greeting the congregation after the service, one elderly gentlemen farmer came up to me and spoke quietly. I thought for sure he was going to complement the service. This is what came out of his mouth, "Pastor, you forgot the Lord's Prayer." Here we just experienced one of the best Good Friday services I had ever been a part of, and all he could

say was, "Pastor, you forgot the Lord's prayer." I am so lucky he could not read my mind at that point. How dare he give a critical word after God had blessed this service in its entirety. After all, this man at 75 had said the same Lord's Prayer for 75 years. That memory has come back to me several times since. He died not too long after that and I did his funeral. Here is my point. I had to ask the Lord to forgive me for my bad attitude toward this person for not doing the Lord's Prayer and here is why. For reasons that only God and Harold know, doing the Lord's Prayer in church never grew old to him. It is during the Lord's Prayer that he felt a special connection to God. Harold was not being an old poop to me by his statement. He was saying, "Pastor the Lord's Prayer is one of the most important parts of the worship service to me." "Please don't leave it out."

"Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!" The hymns (songs) that we sing were written by people moved by God's Spirit to put the truth of God's word into music. Now that we are gathering again, hymns are being picked that you suggested and wanted to be picked. When singing, please put your all into them, men, and women alike. You may not have a solo voice, but God is listening as you put your heart and soul into singing. You are singing to an audience of one, God Himself. My own father had a terrible singing voice. I have never heard any person here sing as lousy as he did there. He sang with gusto, everything he had, making a joyful noise unto the Lord. Whenever he sang "How Great Thou Art," his eyes often were filled with tears. This is my point. For some, God has a special way of coming to you when you sing out to Him. The words you are singing become your words to God. It is like you are given a special language when singing that only God can hear because He is listening to your heart. Your notes may be sharp or flat or way off, but it does not matter to God. He is listening to the song of your heart, your yearning to be closer to God through music. We will do our best to pick singable songs and we ask you to sing unto the Lord with all your heart, making a joyful noise unto the Lord. You are singing to an audience of one, God, and God is listening.

"²Serve the Lord with gladness!" Friends, worshipping God is work. It takes energy, effort, and a mind that is active, to worship our Holy God. One way that we serve God is to worship God in the company of God's gathered people. You are doing an act of service unto God by worshipping Him. You came out of your Mama in order to be in relationship with God and worship God. We are here to glorify God and enjoy God forever. God asks of us to come gladly. It is my opinion a worship service that is dead, dull, and boring is a sin. When our attitudes in worship are sour, it hinders what God wishes to do for us and in us during worship. When we come gladly, thanking God for the privilege of being here, something supernatural occurs and you know you are worshipping God in the very Presence of God. It is an act of service unto God. There is new life sent by God to regenerate us, renew us, and change us. There is no time to be bored. Worshipping with an attitude of gladness, with an attitude of expectancy makes the time go by so quickly.

Some of you tire of my stories, but I don't. When the days came that my mother no longer knew any of us due to her Alzheimer's, I would take her to church. She sang all the hymns, did the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed. It was as if Mother was back for the hour of worship. I did not want worship to end because Mother was Mother again for the length of the worship service. She was serving the Lord with gladness in her heart. I say her worship of God was more of a blessing to God than those of us who still had our minds because of the gladness she expressed toward God. All her pistons were firing so to speak. Please serve and worship our Lord with gladness. Come into His Presence with singing. Worshipping joyfully, gladly, is a way of expressing appreciation to God for His very Presence with us and in us. There is nothing greater than experiencing the Presence of God. His Presence makes everything worth it and God is always worthy of our worship.

"³Know that the Lord, He is God." When you know God, you have a deep yearning to worship God. The Lord is God. What is even more amazing than the fact that you know God is

this, God knows you. God knows your name. God is intimately acquainted with you and still loves you. He loves us all equally. It is only in knowing God and God knowing you that gives us reason to live. It is only in knowing God and God knowing you that you have purpose in this life. Knowing God and God knowing you is what life is all about. You have reason to get out of bed every day, to know God and God knowing you. It is that one relationship that gives meaning to life and a fulfillment in this life the non-believer can never know. We come to worship because we know God and God knows us. He calls us to gather weekly. He is waiting for you to enter the sanctuary with gladness so He can hear your joyful noise, the song of your heart. You honor God by entering the sanctuary worshipping God in spirit and in truth.

“³It is He who made us, and we are His; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture.” It is in knowing God and God knowing you that you learn your life came from God. The only reason you were born is God wanted you to be born. Your life was given by God. Your life is no accident and not a mistake for God does not make mistakes. He gave you your life. He made you. God’s image is in you We are God’s sheep and the Lord is our Shepherd.

“⁴Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise! Give thanks to Him; bless His name!” Friends, God has already done more for us than we will ever know. We will have all of eternity to thank Him. Having a thankful heart attitude toward God makes coming to worship a pleasure and not a drudgery. When your heart is thankful toward God, it opens up your ears to hear from God. Recently someone said something to me that put me into orbit. I knew better than to respond and for once exercised self-control; I did not say a word. My heart toward that particular person was much less than thankful. After I calmed down it hit me that if someone else had said the same thing to me, a person for whom I was thankful, I would have thanked that person for their honesty and seen the love from which it was spoken. When we enter worship with a thankful attitude toward God, it makes all the difference in the world. You

can hear what God wishes to communicate directly to you throughout the worship service, and God's truth comes to you in perfect love.

"⁵For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations."

Please repeat after me, "For the Lord is good." Friends, the goodness of God never grows old. At different parts of the worship service you may find yourself connecting to the goodness of God. I certainly do during the confession of sin and then receiving God's forgiveness. God's goodness is right there. The person I spoke of earlier gained a sense of God's goodness by reciting the Lord's Prayer. That was a holy time for him. In some services when we have special music you hear something so wonderful and become aware all over again at how good God is. When I see young people sincerely worshipping God I see God's goodness all over the place. Seeing that glimmer in your eyes during worship speaks volumes to me for God is touching you with His goodness. God is totally good, and God never changes. God's love endures forever and His faithfulness to every generation. Amen and Amen.