

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Psalm 100

- 1 Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.
- 2 Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.
- 3 Know that the Lord is God.
It is he that made us, and we are his;[a]
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.

So—there was this guy named Job. Chances are that most of you have heard of him. If not, here's a whole book in the Bible that tells the story of a dark time in his life. It wasn't always that way for Job. He actually had a pretty good life. He had everything he needed and then some.

Job was also a faithful man of God. God was impressed with Job's faithfulness. In fact, one day God bragged to the devil about this awesome man of God. The devil contradicted God's praise of Job by claiming that Job was a good man because God watched over him and made sure life was good for Job. However, if hard times fell on Job,— the devil was sure Job would falter.

So, God and the devil made this little deal. To the delight of the devil, God permitted him to make life rough for Job—but he could not hurt Job—to see if Job would remain faithful to God. The challenge was on. Job's children died. He lost his livelihood. He lost nearly everything. One can only imagine the shock, confusion and grief Job felt. What was Job to do?

The Bible tells us in Job 1:20-21 that “then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped God. And he said, ‘Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’” Did you hear that? Job was consumed by grief—yet he worshiped God!

Last Sunday, we thought about change and the grief often times associated with it. We reflected on this particularly in relationship to the change and grief you, the Hagerstown Church of the Brethren family, are experiencing after the departure of your beloved pastors.

Together we explored the emotions one goes through when grieving—shock, denial, bargaining, anger, depression and acceptance. It's a fact that the grieving process is not something to be hurried. It is important to make the journey through all that we are feeling in order to experience healthy emotional and spiritual healing.

There are things we can do to help us move through the grieving process. One of those things is just what Job did—that is, worship God. How can worship help us with our grief?

It may be helpful to us to begin exploring this by looking at the basic definition of worship. The online dictionary says that worship is the feeling or expression of reverence and adoration for a deity—it's the feeling or expression of reverence and adoration for a deity.

The words of the psalm that was read for us this morning fits this definition of worship. It offers praise and adoration for God's greatness. It expresses gratitude for God's faithfulness.

There are many scriptures that speak of worship. Psalm 95:6-7 says, "O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand." In First Chronicles 16:29 we read, "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him! Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness—" And in Psalm 99:5 we read, "Extol the Lord our God; worship at his footstool. Holy is he!"

It's inspirational to read these positive words of worship of God, isn't it? They make worship sound like a high emotional moment—something that everyone gets excited to do. But, let's be honest here. We don't always feel like worshiping God. Things happen in life that influence our attitudes and emotions about worshiping God. Think again about Job. I can't imagine he entered into worship on an emotional high.

With that in mind, did you notice in the few scriptures I read that they all charged us to worship. A recurring message in the scriptures is the command to worship God. Never does it say that we should wait for the good moments in life to worship God. Nor does it say we can only worship God when we are feeling an emotional high. Instead, again and again, we are commanded to worship God. And stories like Job's confirm the charge to worship God in all circumstances. Even our definition of worship states that it is a feeling **OR** an expression.

I suspect there are those of you who may not have felt overly enthusiastic about coming to worship this morning and the reason for this could be because you are sad and miss Tim and Audrey. I'm sure there are those who are grieving this loss and have decided to step back from attending worship because they are disappointed, maybe even angry with God.

But now, brothers and sisters, is exactly when we need to worship God. Now is when we need to be obedient to the words of the scriptures commanding us to worship God. When we do not feel like worshiping God—for whatever reason—is when we need to call upon ourselves to make worship a spiritual discipline. There are times during our faith journey when worshiping God is nothing more than a spiritual discipline—a discipline, not a punishment, but a good habit that keeps God on our personal radars while we deal with our feelings and the change in our lives.

You see, we need to worship God. Did you ever stop to think about why we worship God? Does God need our worship? God certainly doesn't need our praises and approval to feel good about himself. God has no needs.

Worshiping God reminds us who our God is and who we are in relationship to God. It's too easy to make other things into gods. Money, possessions, power, television, sports, friends—anything—even feelings that we don't want to deal with can easily become our gods. You know, there's a command about that too. In fact, it is the first of God's Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

Worshiping God with our praise and thanksgiving reminds us not only of who our God is, but also what our God has done for us. The Great Creator God of all the universe provides all that we need—maybe not exactly everything we want—but God does provide all that we need. We have the opportunity to remember what God has done for us as we express our appreciation, and as we remember that we can't help but acknowledge our need for God.

Worshiping God puts everything into proper perspective. Yes, through worship we recognize our need for God, our dependence on God as individuals, but also as a congregation. As we pray together, we lean on God and call on God, we rely on God's guidance to help us through our change as a church and the grief associated with the change. Our worship of God

through this transition will give us perseverance and encouragement. It is a way we say to God—“We trust you God to lead us.”

That brings me to one more point I want to make about worship. While worship can and should happen anywhere and everywhere and while it can and should be done even when we are alone, corporate worship is a must too. Worshiping God certainly builds and strengthens our personal relationship with God, but corporate worship also deepens and strengthens our relationship with each other. We need each other, especially when we go through times of difficulty, discord, and transition.

Worshiping together gives voice and acknowledgement to our commitment to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. Our worship with one another sends a message of understanding and encouragement to those with whom we worship. It binds us to each other as it binds us to God. Worshiping God with one another is another way of expressing our dedication to working together to be the body of Christ through the Hagerstown COB—even as we venture the new path God has put before us.

The scriptures tell us that corporate worship is by God’s design. The Israelites, wondering in the wilderness, worshiped God together. The early church worshiped God together. In Hebrews 10:24-25 we read, “Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day dawning near.”

Rob Record, author of “Forged by Fire,” shares this personal story.

“I had a severe cervical injury. The pain was so excruciating that the hospital staff couldn’t do an MRI until I was significantly sedated. The MRI showed significant damage at three major points in the cervical area. Because of the swelling of injured nerve bundles, the only way I could relieve the pain was to use a strong, prescribed narcotic and to lie on bags of ice. Sleep, what little there was, came only by sitting in a reclining chair.

“Approximately forty-eight hours from the onset of the injury, doctors estimated that I had lost about 80 percent of the strength in my left arm. Three fingers on my left hand totally lost feeling. The slightest movements would send pain waves hurtling down my left side and shoulder. I had to step away completely from my work (which I love) and wear a neck brace twenty-four hours a day for five weeks.

“About halfway through that experience, I was sitting on the screened-in porch behind our home. The day was cold and blustery, but I needed a change of scenery. Suddenly a bird landed on the railing and began to sing. On that cold rainy day, I couldn’t believe any creature had a reason to sing. I wanted to shoot that bird! But he continued to warble, and I had no choice but to listen.

“The next day I was on the porch again, but this time it was bright, sunny, and warm. I was tempted to feel sorry for myself when suddenly the bird (at least it looked like the same one) returned. And he was singing again! Where was that shotgun!

“Then it hit me: the bird sang in the cold rain as well as the sunny warmth. His song was not altered by outward circumstances, but it was held constant by an internal condition. It was as though God quietly said to me, ‘You’ve got the same choice, Bob. You will either let external circumstances mold your attitude, or your attitude will rise above the external circumstances. You choose!’”

What will we choose? Will we choose to worship—with an openness to God’s healing power? Worshiping our almighty God together will help get you—the Hagerstown church of the

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Brethren—to journey through the rough waters of change. Commit yourselves to jointly putting God first—admitting your shared need for God as a congregation through worshiping together. In your worship, join your voices in praising and thanking God. Pray with one another, ponder the word with others seeking God, thereby, also encouraging and supporting one another. And the Divine one who loves you will help you and bring you—his beloved children—into a new and brighter day. Amen.