

**Preacher:** Pastor Twyla

**Scripture:** Psalm 84

*The Joy of Worship in the Temple*

*To the leader: according to The Gittith. Of the Korahites. A Psalm.*

<sup>1</sup> *How lovely is your dwelling place,  
O Lord of hosts!*

<sup>2</sup> *My soul longs, indeed it faints,  
for the courts of the Lord;  
my heart and my flesh sing for joy  
to the living God.*

<sup>3</sup> *Even the sparrow finds a home  
and the swallow a nest for herself,  
where she may lay her young,  
at your altars, O Lord of hosts,  
my King and my God.*

<sup>4</sup> *Happy are those who live in your house,  
ever singing your praise. Selah*

<sup>5</sup> *Happy are those whose strength is in you,  
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.[a]*

<sup>6</sup> *As they go through the valley of Baca,  
they make it a place of springs;  
the early rain also covers it with pools.*

<sup>7</sup> *They go from strength to strength;  
the God of gods will be seen in Zion.*

<sup>8</sup> *O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer;  
give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah*

<sup>9</sup> *Behold our shield, O God;  
look on the face of your anointed.*

*For a day in your courts is better  
than a thousand elsewhere.*

*I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God  
than live in the tents of wickedness.*

<sup>11</sup> *For the Lord God is a sun and shield;  
he bestows favor and honor.*

*No good thing does the Lord withhold  
from those who walk uprightly.*

<sup>12</sup> *O Lord of hosts,  
happy is everyone who trusts in you.*

An elderly lady was amazed at how nice the young man was next door. Every day, he would help her gather things from her car or help her in her yard. One day the old lady finally asked the young man, "Son, how did you become such a fine young man?"

The young man replied, "Well, when I was a boy, I had a drug problem."

The old lady was shocked, "I can't believe that."

The young man replied, "It's true, my parents drug me to church on Sunday morning, drug me to church on Sunday night, and drug me to church on Wednesday night."

Maybe as a child I felt like I was being drug to church, I just don't remember. Did you ever feel that way? However, I do remember a time when my father told me that if Don wanted to see me on a Sunday, he had to go to church with me. I did rebel against that a bit. I felt a tug inside towards feeling forced to go to church, not just for Don, but for myself.

But as years went by, and after Don and I got married and attended a Sunday School class with other young married couples, we looked forward to going to church. Part of that certainly was because our friends were there, but there was no denying that we were growing in our faith too, so we wanted to be there to be close to God. I think we realized we needed that special time with God and with our church family to help us stay pointed in the right direction as we journeyed through the week.

Psalm 84 is a song expressing love and longing to be in the presence of God. The psalmist longs to be in the Temple—the place—the sacred space where we find God, and he longs for the Living God in that space. Wonder with me if you will. How do you feel when you decide to attend church. Do you dread coming; do you feel complacent about it; or do you look forward to it, perhaps with great passion and desire? These are a few things to think about as we explore what this text says to us.

Let's begin by considering who wrote the Psalm and perhaps why. The sons of Korah are attributed with writing Psalm 84; although a few commentary writers give David the credit. Every Bible I own gives credit to the sons of Korah. Who were these people?

Korah was a Levite, meaning he descended from the Hebrew tribe of Levi, one of the twelve tribes of Israel. They were members especially of that part of it which provided assistants to the priests in the Jewish temple.

Now Korah was not in agreement with Moses on some theological points and so he went after Moses. Moses told Korah and his followers that they should allow God to settle their disagreement. So, everyone gathered before the Temple tent to listen for God. Apparently, God settled the issue by having the ground open up and swallow Korah and his followers. In the story in Numbers 16:31-35, we learn that another 250 men were consumed by fire.

But we are told in Numbers 26:11, not all of the sons of Korah died. Some of the sons of Korah became prominent in Levitical standing, where they actually served in the tabernacle and the temple. They were put in charge of the worship, or works of service and keepers of the thresholds, meaning they were the doorkeepers of the temple. They were passionate about being in God's house, and they remained that way even though they worked there all day long. They never tired of being with God.

Another point to consider is related to possibly why this song was written. We know that the Israelites celebrated several festivals and that often meant, if possible, making a trip to Jerusalem to worship in the temple. Commentary writer, William Barclay suggests that this psalm may have been written for the New Year festival, held sometime in September or October. It was a time to celebrate the beginning of a new agricultural cycle when God's love of creating was made visible again.

At the same time, they celebrated God's love for humanity, and the re-creating he does in people's lives as he forgives them and renews them in the ongoing journey of their lives. Barclay says that during the festival the people prayed for, "the coming of the rains to recreate the dry soil; and the outpouring of God's Spirit to recreate the hard and dry hearts of the people of Israel." From their family history, the sons of Korah certainly knew something about God's recreative power in humanity.

So, here in this Psalm we have the story of the sons of Korah and others being excited and passionate about being in the temple worshiping God. Although saying this may sound a bit sterile, worshiping God served a purpose. They were pilgrims on the journey of life who were in awe of the greatness of God, and they recognized that they needed this almighty, powerful, and caring God to be with them on their journey.

I suspect that they also recognized their vulnerability to stray from God and so, they needed to do something to help them stay connected to God, and that meant worshiping God. Granted, God's instructions to his people included that they should worship him, and only him, but they could have chosen not to do so; and we know that throughout their history there were times when they did, in fact, fail to worship God. We know that other things became more important to them, and those things became their gods. In so doing, they made a mess of their lives.

With what we have thus far uncovered about this text by just looking at the context of it, it might be fair to say that our attitude and commitment to attending worship has a direct correlation to our attitude and our faithfulness towards God as we live out the rest of our week. Through the days of the pandemic, we have learned how to use technology to make it possible for us to worship our God together virtually, if and when, it becomes necessary.

It was very important to me when at the height of the pandemic, when the church needed to close down for a while, that whatever worship experience we did in the meantime through Facebook Live, that it take place from within the house of God, and be as close to what our usual Sunday worship time together was like. I was here to preach, Don led worship and Burt led us in worship through music, and Ron was here to make the technology work, here from our sanctuary. Many of you expressed your gratitude that we did this. Through this we were able to worship God, connected virtually with each other in our precious setting of the sanctuary at HCOB.

Worshiping together in-person in God's house is God's desire for us because He knows the benefits it has on building and strengthening the body of Christ; and, how it nurtures and fortifies our personal faith. Thanks be to God, for his guidance during the pandemic. We did not allow; nor can we ever let anything, not even a pandemic, stop us from worshiping God. We will continue to have the technology option available for those who cannot, due to illness, distance, being shut-in, although they may wish they could, attend worship in-person. Simply put, we need to get our spiritual tanks refilled with all things that are of God.

There's an interesting story involving a town in Tifton, GA. It seems the most interesting thing about Tifton is an abandoned Victorian house filled with thousands of bats. Tift County declared the once-elegant house in the town's historic district off limits after a bat specialist said that maybe 20,000 bats had moved in, apparently for good.

Now, teenagers call it the bat house. People talk about the smell, which is an unholy mix of animal urine and decaying wood. "In the summer, ooh, does that place reek," said Linda Turner, 69, a retired nurse and neighbor. "You ain't smelled nothing until you come back here on a hot day."

That bat house is one place I would not want to visit. WHAT A SIGHT AND WHAT A STINK IT MUST BE! Vacant houses get infiltrated with all kinds of creatures and probably not just bats. And many of these creatures make a mess, create a big stink, and eventually ruin that dwelling.

But it doesn't just happen with vacant houses, it also happens with vacant lives! If a person doesn't fill their life with good stuff, the bad stuff and sometimes, the evil stuff will move in and take over.

Psalms 84, in essence asks us, What's going on in your house? That is, the house you live in, the fleshly body you live in? Who has moved in? Who has taken over your residence and controlling your life? God wants us to stay clean in this world and that will only happen when we let Him move in, that is, when we fill our lives with worship, prayer and service. Gathering in God's holy house gives us a dedicated time and place for all of this to happen.

The Psalmist tells us through verses one and two that God's house is a place to satisfy our passion. Maybe you would not describe the feeling you get when planning to come to church as a passion, at least not a burning; yet you know something is missing when you do not attend. The truth is that as we worship in God's house, we become more aware of God's grace, mercy and love for us.

We find ourselves connecting with something, someone, God, indeed, and that connection sends our soul on a mission to seek him out more. We find growing within us the Holy Spirit stirring the embers of our souls causing us to yearn to worship and know God. The sons of Korah, who wrote other Psalms as well as this one, sang the following as written in Psalm 42:1-2, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?" I say, we appear before God, and our thirst for God is satisfied over and over again.

In verse three, through his reflection on how even a sparrow finds a home at the altar of God, the Psalmist celebrates that God's house is a place for all to take refuge. I read about, but don't remember ever seeing a painting entitled "Peace." "It depicts waves crashing against the jagged rocks. It portrays the violence of a crushing storm. It seems anything but peaceful. But down in a small corner of the painting, tucked away in the rocks, is a bird sitting on her nest totally oblivious to the raging storm going on around her."

That is peace, the kind of peace found as we worship in God's house. It's a special time and place where we can pour out our cares, our sorrows and our needs. We can feel, (vulnerable as we may be), we can feel a sense of release and escape from the world. Anyone and everyone is welcome to find refuge in this place. It is here that a pilgrim, seeking God knowingly or unknowingly, can find rest and a place of belonging.

We read in scriptures that God watches over and provides care for even the sparrow, and so he does for us also. Nowhere should, it be more apparent to us than here in God's house, that God provides a place of refuge and peace for us. And, as we take refuge here, together as brothers and sisters in this part of the body of Christ, through our integrity, welcoming spirit, service and faithfulness to God, we offer others a place of refuge here at HCOB.

In verse four we are reminded that God's house is a place to bless and be blessed. We were created to bless and praise God in worship. In blessing God we too are blessed, as we find joy and contentment in pleasing God. A key word in verse four is to "dwell or live" in God's house. This word has the same meaning as to "abide," which might sound familiar to most Christians. That's because Jesus said that if we abide in him, he will abide in us, and we will bear much fruit (John 15:5). It stands to reason then that living and abiding in God's house will lead

to blessing, because the more we spend time with God, the more we will know God, and the more we will experience God's power and presence, not only in God's house of worship, but in all of our lives.

Finally, in verse ten, The Psalmist calls to mind that God's house is a place we would rather be. The sons of Korah, knowing what it was like to live in the wickedness of the world, said, "For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness." Eugene Petersen interprets verse ten this way in the Message: "One day spent in your house, this beautiful place of worship, beats thousands spent on Greek island beaches. I'd rather scrub floors in the house of my God than be honored as a guest in the palace of sin."

How often do you think to yourself I would rather be doing this or that, or I would rather be here or there? I wonder, can we honestly say that there is nothing more that we want to do than to worship God and there is nowhere we would rather be than in God's house? Wow, I mean wow, how often do we stop to consider these questions?

Our attitude and dedication towards worshiping God in God's house, in-person or virtually if necessary, is reflected in the decisions we make and the way we live throughout the week. The more we come together to hear and study God's word, and to worship God, the more our hearts and minds become one with God, and our lives reflect that. I am sure that like me, you do not want to absorb and participate in the wickedness of the lost portion of our world. Therefore, together we need to continually feed and grow our passion to dwell in God's house, making us one with God. We are pilgrims on a journey, may our journey be led by our passion to be one with God. Amen.