

Joyful Noise (Psalm 100)

My constant companion over the last two weeks with all the quality time in my car has been my GPS. This device has been tremendously helpful navigating roads and helping me find my way. The angelic, heavenly voice has guided me through the perils of wrong turns, missed turns, and u-turn; always gently leading me back to the right road and going in the right direction. Two observations many people make with the GPS is that first it is a woman's wisdom you guides you on the way; I don't see any questions on that today. The other observation is that when you get off track with a GPS, it will calmly, almost in a monotone voice say "recalculating"; sometimes over and over and over, depending on how well you follow directions. Which makes me wonder about how do you and I recalculate in the midst of our life? When Wednesday afternoon rolls around and I hear gossip at the expense of another person and laugh, how do I recalculate at that moment? How do I recalculate when the lingering frustration of one moment find its escape at the expense of my family? How might I find my way back when the frantic pace prods me toward a place where I am too tired and feel distant from God?

Ever found yourself asking a question like that in the hours outside of church, and all you want is some kind of gentle, angelic voice to suddenly sing out and recalculate that moment in your life? While the psalmist did not have a GPS, she still lists out some places where we might turn to sense, or more specifically, hear God's presence. The psalm lifts up images of joyful noises like trumpets, melody of a lute, and in creation itself. But two that awaken a vivid picture in my mind are the roaring sea and floods clapping their hands. Wait, wait doesn't that seem a bit odd in the midst of a psalm that begins with an invitation to make a joyful noise? A roaring sea that comes crashing down on the shore damaging homes or a stream that overflows its usual boundaries, these are what the newscasts would call natural disasters. These are moments we would pray for and organize relief efforts. These are not what pop into my mind when I image what a joyful noise is all about.

You know I have usually missed this tension. Swept up in making a joyful noise, I've just kept on going as though these two images don't in the least challenge or if not outright contradict the words, joyful noise. To be sure, it still is clearly in the noise category, but not in a good or joyful way. Stormy roaring seas are dangerous for those whose boats are tossed in the surf. As we have seen in the last few weeks the roaring of the seas in the gulf region wreaking an oily havoc on God's creation and human lives. Images of flooding as we have seen this year in Nashville, places down South and know from our own experience here in Janesville just a few short years ago are destructive. This brings chaos to individual and communal lives. But therein is the rub. For out of watery chaos in scripture, God keeps stirring. God's spirit surfs over watery

chaos as the first act of creation. Noah sent out a dove on a scouting mission even before the watery chaos was gone. Jesus broke through the watery chaos cradled in John's arms beginning a new song God was singing. Watery chaos in scripture is not the last word. God sings a song, a new song, out of those moments. As I ponder this... there is a deeper characteristic of God that I had not considered before holding in tension joyful noise and watery chaos which is God is not silent in moments when we feel tossed about but perhaps finding a way to sing a new song.

God need not compose that new song in a major key. Rewind and replay in your mind the hymns that have filled this sanctuary. There is a vast theology swirling around us, we have sung deep truths about God. We sang about God's protection and care being at once a "Mighty Fortress" and as being cradled close in the care of an "Eagle's Wing". We've sung of God who is felt no matter the season; rain or snow or sun. God knows where we are, even when we shout out "here I am, Lord". We sang of God who keeps on inviting us to widen our embrace of the stranger who we now welcomed as a beloved friend. My experience is that what stays with people are hymns. What are you more likely to recall by Wednesday this week; a hymn we sang in worship or the sermon? That's a rhetorical question, by the way! We come back to hymns throughout the week because it is a moment we encounter and experience the sacred in an embodied way, that is different that just words. And for me, one way I find myself recalculating or trying to get back in sync with God's presence when I feel like I've veered off course is to recall a hymn we sang in worship. In that I also hear your voices singing to me, calling me back, and in that I hear and encounter God calling me back as beloved. So, this week, I invite you to notice which of the hymns you catch yourself humming. And in that moment, I pray you will sense God and a smile will cross your face. But there is a better way to say all this and it goes like this: "Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her king. Let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing. And heaven and nature sing. And heaven and heaven and nature sing." May we keep on singing along with heaven and nature this week?

Thanks be to God and let all God's people say, "Amen!"