

Gathered Worship

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Do you know why we gather on Sundays? Because Sunday is the third day after Good Friday. It commemorates the resurrection of Jesus, which is why we often say church is *the people of God gathered around the risen Christ*. But as our society becomes more secularized, and Christians become less devoted, people treat it like Sunday-Funday or a second Saturday. The French have been doing this for decades. Consider what French philosopher Michel Houellebecq says: “[On Sunday morning I went out for a while in the neighborhood; I bought some raisin bread. The day was warm but a little sad, as Sundays often are in Paris, especially when one doesn't believe in God.](#)” His fiction explores the misery of atheism, what he describes as *concern with survival not sacredness*. But we're concerned with the sacred, today, the meaning of gathered worship. *Call to Worship, Communion with God, Concluding Gratitude.*

Call to Worship

Every Sunday we begin our service with a Call to Worship, not because we haven't worshipped during the week but because we experience worship drift: drifting from the sacred thing to lesser things. We need a gracious summons to worship the one, true God, to be called out of the doldrums to behold the divine splendor of

God; to heed a call to bring our genuine concerns into his capable presence, not try solve them on our own. Psalm 100 is a *call to worship*, a gracious summons to praise the Lord. The psalm begins with a triple imperative: **Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!** Exuberance flits off the page. But *who* is being called to worship? Make a joyful noise, *all the earth*. The audience is global because God is deserving of praise from every nation in all the earth. But, for that to happen, worship also has to be local. You can't get global praise without local praise: enter his gates with thanksgiving. So while the whole earth is in view, the call to worship funnels down to a local gathering of ordinary people. The ekklesia, church, *people of God gathered around the risen Christ*. But what do we gather for? This isn't a comprehensive list, but it includes some essential elements. **Make a joyful noise.** We often joke that "a joyful noise" is for people like me, who can't carry a note, emphasis on the noise. But the word means *to pay homage to a king*. Picture throngs of people lining the streets as the king returns on his horse from victory. It's more joyful shout than off-pitch singing. A joy that wells up within us when we encounter our King. One commentator says it's **abandoning the reserved constraints of civil society and giving ourselves away to the glad emotion of communion with God.** *Glad emotion of communion with God.* Are you settling for stodgy,

reserved, self-regarding praise? We get a glimpse of heavenly worship in Revelation, where the 24 elders sitting on their thrones *fall on their faces and worship* (11:16-18). Unafraid lose their dignity they shout and bow. Perhaps it's time we lost our dignity for the divine? Next, ***serve the Lord with gladness***. Think of your role in our gatherings: serving in kids life, slides, greeting, prayer, music, giving, encouraging others. Notice he doesn't say serve the Lord but serve the Lord *with gladness*. Serve him not because it's your duty, although it is, or because you are doing your church a favor, though you are, but serve *the Lord* with joy. How do we do this when we're wrangling kids, thinking about our needs, struggling to find joy? It begins Sunday morning, where we not only prepare to serve but ponder Christ, [who came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many](#) (Matt 18:20). We uncover gladness in serving when we recognize Christ joyfully serving us! When we come full with Christ, we spill over in our service to Christ. ***Come into his presence with singing***. The Hebrew word for presence means head or face. When the church gathers we come *before the face of God*. We encounter his presence. What if we gathered expectantly, eager to come before the face of God with *singing, service, and shouts*? We'd lose our dignity; we'd gladly serve; we'd sing before the sacred.

Communion with God

Why should we heed his triple praise imperative? Verse 3: to **Know that the LORD, he is God!** Worship is grounded in theological reflection: *knowing God*. How can we know God? Intimately and reverently. **Intimately:** *we are his people, the sheep of his pasture*. It's personal: *his* people; it is intimate, sheep of *his* pasture. This is a picture of intimate knowledge not objective knowledge, something many people in our society really struggle with. Loneliness is at record highs. Lots of people say they don't have a single real friend. Many of us are poor friends. Why? One reason we replace intimate knowledge with digital knowledge. Say you see someone and think I know all the stuff about them from social media, so I don't really need to ask them any questions. I guess I'll just comment on their life or talk about myself. We talk about people without talking with people. We know where they've been, the food they like, things they're into, but when it comes to knowing *why* they like these things, how they *feel* about life, *what* their *real* struggles and joys are, we come up blank. Why? Settling for digital knowledge, while *real* person slips away. This psalm is saying: don't settle for talking about God when you can talk with God, for digital knowledge when you can have intimate communion. And the more we know God, the more we want to praise him. *Relational theology leads to real doxology*. What do we discover about him? He is a **shepherd** and we

are the sheep of his pasture. It's an allusion to Ezekiel 34, where there's no commentary on how dumb or dirty sheep are, but how neglectful, manipulative, and exploitive the shepherds of Israel. So what does God do? He steps in *to be their **Shepherd***. *Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep (11-12). I myself; I God says will seek them out. It's *personal* for God. You are of intimate interest to him. *My sheep. Friends the world may tell you that you are not important but let me assure you, You are eternally important to the one who matters most. Are you dispirited, lonely, wandering? The good Shepherd searches for you! Once he has us, he doesn't berate us; he puts us out to pasture. What's it like? *And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel.* God has *plenty*, mountains of love, grace, peace to satisfy us. *There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed.* Not only does he have plenty but his cuisine is *paradisical*: good and rich. Don't settle for the fast food when you can have meadows of marvelous morsels. *I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD.* You ever feel stuck, resistant to communion with God? You need to rest but all you can think about is what needs to be done or what has been done to you? Ask the Lord to *make you lie down* in green pastures. He'll coax your legs to fold in his green grass. Know the Lord is God. And the striking**

thing is he feels this way, knowing we're resistant, knowing our worship drift. That's why Christ is the shepherd **who lays down his life for the sheep** (Jn 10:1). Now this would have been quite rare. A shepherd's goal was to *live* not die for the sheep. But his heart so compassionate and our needs are so great, that Jesus died to deliver us from idols and make us his own. We are *his* people, the sheep of *his* pasture. Know the Lord *intimately*. Know the Lord **reverently**: **It is he who made us, and we are his.** God is *also* our **Maker**. It's a relationship between unequals. *He is God* and we are not. He is unmade; we are made. He is infinite; we are finite. He has no beginning or end; we are vapors that vanish into the mist. *We are his.* We belong to him; we do not belong to ourselves. When we point to our kids and say, That one belongs to me It's not a statement of reluctant ownership (ok sometimes it is), but not for God. He says, eyes beaming, *You belong to me.* These are mine. *We are his.* So let's *make a joyful noise, serve the Lord with gladness, and come into his presence with singing.*

Concluding Gratitude

The psalm concludes: **Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name** (4). It's straightforward: gather with gratitude. Thank him for who he is (Ps 104), what he has done (Ps 103), and do so **because is good.** He is

good; not *does* good, which is abundantly clear. God is good. The origin of goodness; the fountain of goodness; the essence of goodness. All goodness flows from him. We're going to take some time later to thank him because he is good. And when his goodness overflows toward us, *it takes the form of steadfast love.* Unwavering love for wavering people. And it endures *forever.* So, let's not settle for survival but seek the sacred, not surrender to talking about God but communing with God, intimately, reverently. Let's give thanks to the Lord.