

Psalm 100 NRSV

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.

Serve the LORD with gladness; come into his presence with singing.

Know that the LORD is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.

Give thanks to him; bless his name.

For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever and his faithfulness to all generations.

Psalm 100 MSG

On your feet now—applaud GOD!

Bring a gift of laughter, sing yourselves into his presence.

Know this: GOD is God, and God, GOD.

He made us; we didn't make him.

We're his people, his well-tended sheep.

Enter with the password: "Thank you!"

Make yourselves at home, talking praise.

Thank him. Worship him.

For GOD is sheer beauty, all-generous in love, loyal always and ever.

The Seattle Symphony was performing Beethoven's Ninth under the direction of Milton Katims...

At this point, you need to understand two things:

- (1) There's a long segment in this symphony where the bass violins don't have a thing to do. Not a single note for page after page.
- (2) There used to be a tavern called Dez's 400 right across the street from the Seattle Opera House, rather favored by local musicians.

It had been decided that during this performance, after the bass players had played their parts in the opening of the Ninth, they were to quietly lay down their instruments and leave the stage rather than sit on their stools looking and feeling dumb for twenty minutes.

Well, once they got backstage, someone suggested that they trot across the street and have a quick drink. After they had downed the first round, one of them said, "We'd better be getting back. It'd be awfully embarrassing if we were late!" Another, probably the one who suggested going to the bar in the first place, replied, "Oh, I figured we could use a little more time, so I tied a string around the last pages of the conductor's score. When he gets down to there, Milton's going to have to slow the tempo way down

while he waves the baton with one hand and fumbles with the string with the other." So they had another round and finally returned to the Opera House, a little tipsy by now. However, as they came back on stage, one look at their conductor's face told them they were in serious trouble.

Katims was furious! And you can understand why: after all...*It was the bottom of the Ninth, the score was tied, and the basses were loaded!*

We have been taking a journey through the Psalms.

The Psalms (that book in the middle of your Bible) are a collection of many different poems from different sources and different authors, written at different times. The Psalms became the hymn book of the people of God. They were collected so that the people of God could sing and pray them in worship and in all kinds of life circumstances. In the last couple of weeks, we looked at the Psalms of Lament and the Imprecatory Psalms — the Psalms that include anger and cursing. I thought having spent time in '*sad and mad*' it might be time to move to *glad*! So today we look at the psalms of Praise and Thanksgiving.

We read Psalm 100, which was literally a processional hymn. We don't do processions much anymore. In a wedding the bride processes down the aisle, and I remember in this church when the choir and the ministers would process into the sanctuary with the opening hymn. So this psalm was a song they would sing as they physically entered into the temple. It behaved as a liturgical tool to help them move physically from the secular space into the sacred space and into the presence of God — but it also helped them to move in mind and spirit from the common and the ordinary into the extraordinary presence of God.

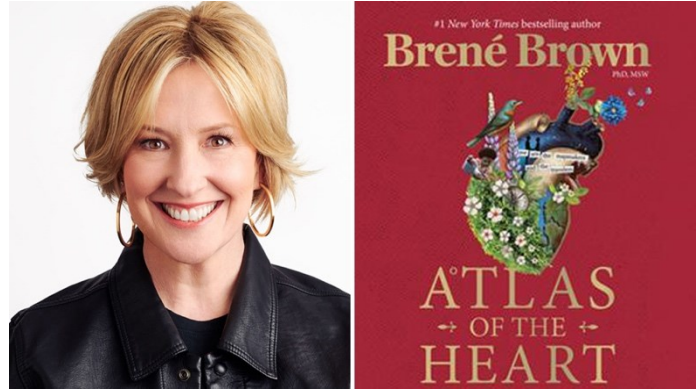
The psalm of praise enables us to make that transition into God's presence. Today moving into the presence of God tends to be more at the spirit and emotional level than at the physical level, and it continues to be important.

We naturally spend our lives fussing and fretting about the tasks and obligations that fill our days. It's easy to go through a day and not be aware of God. I often think of the verse in Mark 4 that comes in the middle of the parable of the Sower. "*Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.*" (Mark 4:18-19)

Life has a way of choking out or blinding us to the presence of God. Life can be hard and heavy. I think we all crave less heaviness, less heartache and more joy.

Some people are genetically more predisposed to being joyful or having of an attitude of gratitude, but everyone can practice gratitude, and everyone can increase their gratitude and therefore their joy. Researchers have shown again and again that gratitude is good for us physically, mentally and spiritually. It improves our physical health and our mental health. There is an increasing upward spiral when we practice gratitude: **the more gratitude you practice, the more joy you will feel.** And the more joy you feel, the more gratitude you will experience!

I read Bréne Brown's *Atlas of the Heart* a year ago or so. It's a wonderful book about our emotions. She is a research professor at the University of Houston, and she's spent the past two decades studying courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy.



When she's asked "What is the scariest emotion?", she says "It's joy!" She describes a sister emotion to joy: **foreboding joy**. Most of us experience foreboding joy when at the same moment that we are appreciating a situation, all of a sudden, we have that feeling that it will be snatched from us. Parents might watch and be mesmerized by their baby sleeping, feel overwhelming love for them, and think "I didn't know I could love this much!" And then in the same moment fear sneaks in, and they imagine something bad happening to the baby. That's foreboding joy. You sit and think "Wow! Life is going really well!" and then you think "Oh no, something bad is going to happen." Sometimes we do foreboding joy as a form of trying to protect ourselves from the bad. But it doesn't work.

Brené Brown interviewed a man who told her: "My whole life I never got too excited about anything. I just stayed in the middle. That way if things didn't work out, I wasn't devastated, and if they did it was a pleasant surprise." But when he was in his 60's, he was in a car accident and his wife of 40 years was killed. He said, "The second I realized she was gone, the first thing I thought of was that I should have leaned more into those moments of joy, because that did not protect me from what I feel right now." We like to dress-rehearse tragedy, thinking that we will protect ourselves from the pain of it. But it doesn't work. Tragedy can still happen, and we will have lost those moments of joy.

Here's the thing — **joy, true joy involves vulnerability. When we lose our tolerance for vulnerability, joy becomes foreboding.** Researchers say that the opposite of joy is not sadness, but fear.

Brown encourages people, when they feel that twinge of foreboding joy, to go into a practice of **gratitude**. Even if you have to fake it for a bit.

On this side of life **joy is fleeting, but gratitude can prolong it**. We get used to cool things. Situations might cause a short spurt of joy, but then we get used to it. But gratitude prolongs the joy! Gratitude is an antidote to taking things for granted, and it's an antidote for foreboding joy which can prevent us from truly appreciating the good that is in our lives.

As people of faith we rejoice and give thanks, not necessarily because life is good, but because God is good. *For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever and his faithfulness to all generations.* We rejoice because God is our creator; God made us and God knows us and God loves us: *Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.*

Do you remember this wonderful old hymn?

Love Divine, all love excelling, joy of heav'n, to earth come down;

*Changed from glory into glory, till with Thee we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love and praise.*

Joy is a fleeting and intense emotion that can make us feel small or vulnerable. So can awe. But that's not a bad thing! *We are small*. Our life is fleeting. Our pets don't live long enough, the tiger lilies are done for another season, our bodies take on new aches and disabilities. But accepting and even embracing that fleetingness can expand us and connect us beyond ourselves — it can connect us to God and to the world God created.

We are created for joy, and this joy does not deny the difficulties of life. As Philippians 4 says *“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say Rejoice ... Do not worry about anything, but in every situation by prayer and petition with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”*



Did any of you watch live or recorded the opening ceremonies of the Olympics in Paris? Did it not fill you with joy when you watched and heard Céline Dion singing Édith Piaf's "L'Hymne à l'amour"? What an incredible performance! Édith Piaf's "L'Hymne à l'amour"? What an incredible performance! But part of what made it so beautiful and incredible was knowing the struggle behind

the performance. I don't know if you've had a chance to watch her recent documentary — it's streaming on Prime— but she's incredibly open about her diagnosis with the rare neurological disorder of '*stiff person syndrome*' which has mostly taken her ability to sing and to perform away. That is a gift that has brought her so, so much joy. Until Friday she had not performed publicly since 2019.

Céline gave us so much hope and joy in that song! And the crowd in the pouring rain and around the world reflected it back! Do you see that **feedback loop of joy and gratitude** that builds?

I hope and pray she will be able to sing and perform more in the future — but I know that life is fleeting and abilities fade. But God's love does not fade. I know that God delights in her singing, and he delights in her silence. God delights in you with your gifts and with your limitations, with your abilities and your disabilities. God loves you and delights in you! Eric Liddell who won gold many years ago in the 400-meter race said: "When I run, I feel God's pleasure." I hope you feel God's pleasure for you!



I hope you feel it, and I also hope you **reflect it out beyond yourself**. People in our world desperately need your joy, your encouragement, your hope.

I pray that you delight in the people God created and in the little things, like your dog doing zoomies, or tasting an in-season raspberry. I also hope that you make a practice of thanksgiving and that you delight in God. Because God is good, all the time. And all the time? God is good!

Thanks be always to God. Amen.

1. **Practicing Gratitude:** The sermon mentioned that gratitude can enhance joy. What are some practical ways you can incorporate gratitude into your daily routine?
2. **Understanding Foreboding Joy:** Brené Brown describes "foreboding joy" as the fear that accompanies moments of happiness. Can you recall a time when you experienced this feeling?
3. **Joy and Vulnerability:** The sermon suggested that true joy involves vulnerability. How do you feel about this idea? Can you think of instances where embracing vulnerability has led to greater joy in your life?