

11th Sunday after the Pentecost August 16, 2020

Trinity United Methodist Church Rev. Geri Hamlen

Pastor Geri: I really miss the Psalms. Since COVID 19, I have pretty much limited myself to one Scripture reading each Sunday. Whereas...in the pre-pandemic days...we might use a Psalm for the Call to Worship, like I did today. Or maybe read a Psalm along with the reading from the New Testament. Looking back I see where I used to have even 3 readings each Sunday. But I have limited myself since March to one Bible reading. Because life is complicated enough that I want worship to be our chance to focus on one main idea rather than standing under a waterfall of words that just wash over us and disappear. But today...I am indulging in 3 Psalms and I really appreciate Jean helping me with musical accompaniment. Psalm 113 at the beginning. Psalm 100 as our reading before the Preaching and then Psalm 67 at the end. Let's drink deeply of ancient beauty of these words.

Scripture Reading Psalm 100 Response 1

Response Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice, give thanks, and sing.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the lands!

Serve the Lord with gladness!

Come into God's presence with singing!

Response Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice, give thanks, and sing.

Serve the Lord with gladness!

Know that the Lord, who made us, is God.

We are the Lord's; we are the people of God, the sheep of God's pasture.

Response Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice, give thanks, and sing.

Enter God's gates with thanksgiving, and God's courts with praise!

Give thanks and bless God's name!

Response Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice, give thanks, and sing.

For the Lord is good; God's steadfast love endures for ever;

God's faithfulness to all generations.

Response Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice, give thanks, and sing.

The words of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

Message 'Worship is Team Work?'

You don't have the words of the Response in front of you:

Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice...give thanks and sing.

Isn't it strange...I miss the Psalms so I use them and they remind me that I miss singing, don't you? Jean's music is lovely but there's something about coming into God's presence in worship...with song. I miss that. I miss the Psalms. I miss your voices rising up to God. I miss a lot of stuff right now.

How about you? Do any of you feel a little bit of nostalgia as you listened to this reading? That wouldn't be surprising. Psalm 100 is 'scheduled' (air quotes) to be read every year on the last Sunday before Advent starts—Christ the King Sunday for those of you who follow the liturgical calendar. This Psalm has been set to music many times over and the phrase: *'Make a joyful noise...'* is part of our Church vocabulary as we affirm that a singing with joy is more important than singing with precision...although that's a good thing too!

Psalm 100 is a Call to Worship...opening words for the community of faith as we gather and have gathered down through the ages.

It reminds us, encourages us to remember who and whose we are:

We are the Lord's; we are the people of God, the sheep of God's pasture.

For people who find the sheep imagery a little disturbing, I remind you that we are also...the seed that God plants. We are sometimes the weeds...like we talked about last week. And we are always the harvest of God's good work among us, for the world. And by whatever name or image or metaphor...we are assured, we come to worship to remember that we are the Lord's; the people of God.

And to remember...*God's steadfast love endures forever.*

The Psalms are powerful reminders of many things.

The things we miss. The things we tend to forget. The movement of God in history.

I told a friend of mine that I was going to use the Psalms this week and he said: Which ones? The Praise Psalms?

The Angry Psalms?

The Desperate or the Grieving Psalms?

Well you can see that I went with the Praise and Worship Psalms...because my sense is that Worship may be the one place all week where you hear words of encouragement and hope!

The Greek word for 'worship' *ekklesia* means: 'called out of the world' and refers to the calling of people from their ordinary life to gather together in sacred time and space. As Bishop Robert Schnase puts it so well: *'Worship breathes life into the community of Christ's followers, forms identity, and provides a place of common learning about faith and listening to God. In worship, people express love for God, serve God, and experience God's gracious love offered freely. Worship forms communities, shapes souls, corrects self-interest, and binds people to each other and to God.'*

That's not to ignore the fact that maybe you too are missing a lot of people, places and things right now. So much has change so quickly. And sometimes, yes, our Worship could occasionally include lamentations to God. Weeping and wailing. Crying out...my God, my God, why have you deserted us? Would that be useful to any of you? Think about that while I continue on and I'll come back to that question later.

You might remember a few weeks ago, I explained how the Church Unique people have identified Engaging Worship as a Value for this Trinity Church. That was the Amazing Grace sermon where Jean played so beautifully. That sermon is posted on the Facebook for July 26 if you didn't get to hear it and on the Trinity web-site if you would like to read it over and think about it some more.

Values are words that express our deepest conviction of what's important. We believe that Engaging Worship, remembering who God is. Who we are. Accepting the invitation of God to be in community together. All of that is what's important to us. And what's important to us makes up our identity as a church. Naming and Claiming our identity as God's people has been part of this Church Unique process because if we don't know who we are...we can't know where we are going. If we don't claim our values as God's people,
it's a whole lot easier to forget....or ignore God's direction and purpose for us.

Values create a road map for us in fulfilling what on earth God wants of us here on the corner of Carpenter and E St. But putting thoughts into words is just a first step. Values are wonderful in and of themselves but they are a first stage, not an end stage. Because words alone do not always create action.

Strategies are the action steps that put meat on the bones of our values. It's strategies that are the next steps towards embodying our values. Strategies make it obvious to those who see and hear us...that we are walking the walk and not just talking the talk. Strategies affirm our integrity in living out the collective potential that God has placed in the Trinity Congregation, surrounded by local/community predicaments and the movement of the Holy Spirit in each of our lives.

And so...the Church Unique people struggled with how to strategize, embody, enliven our value of Engaging Worship. Let me confess to you, on behalf of the group—not as a criticism but just so you know a little more about the process...Sometimes, in brain storming sessions, our brains would run out of steam. Who knew how exhausting it is to sit for several hours thinking and talking about mission and values and strategies...because sometimes there are just too many ideas floating around. And sometimes there just aren't any ideas coming up at all
because our brains are too tired.
And sometimes looking backwards is easier than looking forward.

As I recall...the strategy discussion for Worship took a nostalgic turn. We looked backwards to a time when there was a Worship Team here at Trinity. A Worship team with visually creative people, musically talented people, people who could keep track of the church seasons, people who even wrote prayers and poems and sermons for Trinity. It's been 2 years this September since that group kind of evaporated. **I miss those folks**...even while understanding that God was moving them around for God's purposes.

The absence of a Worship team leaves a hole here at Trinity. For me and for all of us. So it felt quite natural for the Church Unique people to say that a good strategy for embodying our value of Engaging Worship is to resurrect a Worship Team.

But let's keep in mind: Resurrection is God's work, not ours. And strategies in the Church Unique framework are NOT—hurry up and get out there and do something, kind of things. Strategies are something to pray about. Something to ask God about. To listen for. Something to take out and look at, turn over and over and see how and when the Holy Spirit is working put form to the strategy in order to live out the value.

As I prepared for writing this message to you all, I did some deep thinking about teams. You know, our UM system was born out of a Class membership style of organization. John Wesley set it up so everyone was in a class with 10 or 12 other people who learned from each other and supported each other. Who kept track of each other. The classes gave generously to the larger church cause.

And over time, congregations were formed and Committees became the Go-to organizational unit. But by the end of the 20th century...you remember the 1990's? And definitely into the 21st century...Committees have seen a real decrease in popularity. We are fortunate at Trinity to have dedicated Finance, Trustee and Staff Parish committees but it does get harder each year to find people who are willing to serve on Committees.

Since I've been here I've watched the UMW groups struggle with leadership and structure.

The Membership Committee is one person and me.

The Nominating Committee is one person and me.

The Stewardship Committee has gone to a Team model, hoping that would make it more attractive to new people but haven't really met since March.

The Mission Team was created as a Team from the get-go. Skipped the whole Committee structure—Chair, Treasurer, Secretary.

And the Worship Committee became a Worship Team and then disbanded.

I'm really wondering if the Team concept is valid for the work of embodying our value of Engaging worship. Do we really have the energy and the capacity for a Team right now? For team meetings? For all of the discipline and commitments and tasks that go with being a winning and effective team? I don't know...I've been asking God if there is a better way.

I think back on how willing some of you were to let me know your favorite hymns since I've been your pastor. Remember writing that out on those little yellow prayer cards? And then I could use them to help organize our worship.

I remember asking and receiving from many of you your favorite scripture...and wasn't it just last summer that I preached on as many of them as I could.

You weren't members of a specific team at that point. But you were participating, contributing, shaping and molding the worship in this community. Maybe we need a strategy that creates an opportunity for more of you, all of you to offer your thoughts and your ideas...not in a formal meeting sort of way but how about as a comment on Facebook? Or an e-mail to me? Or a phone call or cup of coffee to talk about your ideas? No commitments. No 3 year terms. No regularly scheduled meetings. Just from your mouth to my ears and then let's see what that does to our worship.

Perhaps you have become use to thinking that I am the authority on worship. That I have all the necessary ideas for prayers and preaching. But that's not true. You too may well have ideas and suggestions for how we do worship. And in spite of my 'take charge/just get it done' persona...I would be delighted to hear what you are thinking and imagining.

I know one minister friend of mine who had someone at his church who really wanted to read his sermon before Sunday a.m. and give him some advise about how to make it more personal to the congregation. That would be cool.

I know another UM pastor who does a Bible study one week for the Scripture from next week in order to hear what the people of the congregation are wondering, thinking, asking. Maybe this fall I could start a ZOOM Bible study along those lines for whoever wants to come. That would certainly shape the worship.

I know that there are those of you who are participating in on-line worship with other churches. Would you consider sharing those sources with all of us? Other people might find them valuable and I could certainly gain insight from hearing/seeing how other Churches worship God.

What do you think? I would love to hear...your thoughts and comments about worship can enliven and inform the way our services are designed and presented. Maybe about the elections coming up? The Denominational changes? The social unrest in our country? Your ideas don't even have to be that deep or complicated. Sometimes the best worship is in the quietest of moments and in the emptiest of places.

Of course, this would be a lot easier if we saw each other more often. Sigh.

I miss you all.

I miss the informal conversations after church where ideas can be passed from one person to another.

I miss the Psalms, the singing, the collaborative worship planning.

How about you? I bet there are lots of things that you miss too?

Going back to my earlier question...I wonder....would it be useful, valuable, for us to engage in Lamentation time of worship with each other? Where we could use the Psalms of Despair and Grief and Abandonment?

Jean is going to play us some special music...a Reverie...and I encourage you to think about what you need or want or wish for in terms of how we Worship this wonderful God to whom we belong. This God who loves us and is faithful to us. Because, we can do this together...whether it's as a team. As a community. And always, always...As the family of God. Amen.

ⁱ Schnase, Robert, Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2007, pp. 34 -35.