

Recipe or Entree?

If tomorrow you found pieces of paper on your plate and books on the platters, what would you think? Not much nourishment in them, right? We'd rather have the entrees, the dishes, the food then the recipes to make it. The OT lesson we sang and the Ps. 100 text I just read sure looks like a recipe for giving thanks. Look it up on the internet. Easy-peasy. Start off with, serve, know, then enter into His gates with thanksgiving. Done. Now don't you feel better? Not me I want the food not the recipe.

There is real meat here. It starts with the premise: No Sourpusses allowed – in a way I welcome that. Surely you have people in your life that are Eeyore's, glass not just half empty but surely it will break types. You find them at church. I remarked years ago to my wife that I don't get the people who come to church mad and spiteful. Ben Franklin said, "The discontented man finds no easy chair." C.S. Lewis observed: "... how the humblest, and at the same time most balanced and capacious minds, praised most, while the cranks, misfits and malcontents praised least..." (*Psalms*, 94). Lewis also remarked whomever you think of as being this way, be assured someone else thinks you're that way.

This Psalm definitely starts with: "No sourpusses allowed." Augustine remarks in a sermon that "all the earth" can't hear his voice crying, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord." No matter how loudly I shout it or how much I amplify it, Augustine says that all lands can't hear me. "But," Augustine says, "they do hear Him" (*NPNF* 1, 8, 487). And the command to all lands, every single person is to jubilate. Augustine in the same sermon uses the verb jubilate. We're familiar with the noun "jubilation" but 'jubilate' is considered archaic, but it seems to be a distinctively Christian word. The *Oxford* dictionary says, "used by Christian writers to mean 'shout for joy'." The Latin Vulgate begins our Psalm: *Jubilate Deo*. Augustine says it's a cry of joy without words. "Cries without words is the exulting of a rejoicing mind" (*Ibid.*, 488). It's the kid squealing at an unexpected present. It's a woman trilling at the news her friend is expecting. It's the yelping of the guy who shot his first deer. This loud noise of joy isn't practiced or learned. It just happens from unexpected joy.

Charles Spurgeon, 19th century London Baptist preacher, lived in an era when families still had servants. He observed that right after calling all the lands to jubilate, the Lord says, "Serve Yahweh with gladness." Then he says that God can no more bear being served by a joyless, mopping servant than we can (*Treasury*, II, 235). You know this type: He's the Pharisee Simon who loved little; he's the servant who sullenly waited for his absent, austere Lord to return; he's the disconsolate servant who spurns the Lord's invitation he had once accepted; he's that eldest son who can see no reason for partying inside His fathers' house. Karl Barth said, "Joy is the simplest form of gratitude." No joy, no thanks, no gifts received. We're all thinking: I know who this is, but again we should be looking in the mirror.

What we joyless servants of the Lord need is balsamic consolation. Never heard of that? Neither had I and I couldn't find it on the all-knowing internet. My *Webster's Unabridged* dictionary defines it as "unctuous, soft, mitigating, mild." The phrase itself was from Spurgeon: "Many a one has drawn balsamic consolation from these words: as for instance Melancthon when disconsolately sorrowful over the body of his son in Dresden on 12 July 1559" (*Ibid.* 236). What words consoled him: "It is He that has made us.... we are His." This is the truth behind that posture that reads: "Two Foundational Facts of Human Existence. There is a God. You are Not Him." This is the Anglican bishop going off to bed after setting up with worry with the words: "That's it God; You'll have to rule the world for the rest of the night." This is Luther going to bed saying to God: "I commend all things to you; if you can't do better than I, we're in trouble." And this is his Sacristy Prayer: "if I am left to myself, I will bring it all to destruction."

Ps. 100 goes from bringing us back to the fundamental truth that we're not God and takes us to the truth that Yahweh, the God of promise, of grace, mercy and peace, is. Not only did He make us: we are His people. This is Rodney Atkin's 2006 song delighting he has a people. And you do too: All people are your people. Divisions between people are man-made not God-made. More than that: You're His sheep. Yes, all the freight, weight, and comfort of Ps. 23 is here in Ps. 100. Yahweh is my Shepherd. Who leads me, feeds me, waters me, all the way through this valley of death to Himself in heaven. We're His people by creation and His sheep by recreation. The Good Shepherd became a Sheep and redeemed us from the weight of a Law that we could not keep and constantly accused us; He redeemed us from the curse that Law pronounced upon all who break it: And so we sing, "Think what Spirit dwells within thee;/ What a Father's smile is thine, /What a Savior died to win thee; Child of heaven, shouldst thou repine?" (TLH 423:5).

The Balsamic consolation that comes from our creating and redeeming Lord gives way to jubilation. And concludes with "For the Lord is good." In the face all that is tragic, all that appears random and wrong, all that hurts, all the wrongs that go unrighted and unpunished except on the back of Christ, in the face of evil, wicked, and hateful men blatantly denying the Lord who created and redeemed them, the psalmists says, "Yahweh is good." Pray with David in Ps. 142 to be led out of the prison where God doesn't look good but like a jailer, and doesn't seem to do good to you for Jesus' sake but punishes you. Pray that God bring you out of the prison of your fears, your doubts, your unending why questions; pray that for Jesus' sake by His blood and righteousness He would break you out with David so that you may once again with Zechariah be a prisoner of hope ever giving thanks to Yahweh's name (*Zech.* 9:12).

You and I are not good in any sense of the word. Apart from God who is good and only good, we can only be bad. "My goodness does not reach unto Thee." That's Ps. 16:2. This is the ladder that no matter how high you extend it, falls short. This is thing that is just out of reach but always out. This is God in His Goodness. We sing at Christmas, "I cannot rise to Thee." And what's the answer to that: try harder? Better? No, "Come from on high to me." That's mercy, and in

Ps. 100 we find that His mercy is ever everlasting. O the illustrations people and even preachers of bygone eras came up with to give a feel for everlasting, perhaps that 'feeling' may lead to a wordless cry of joy. Imagine a Diamond Mountain 2 ½ miles high, 2 ½ miles wide, and 2 ½ miles in depth. Every 100 years a little bird comes and sharpens its beak on it. When the whole mountain is worn away by this, then the first second of eternity will be over (*Grimm's*, "The Shepherd Boy").

If God's mercy didn't endure for ever, we'd never know when it ran out. At what point, should we be unsure of our prayers being heard, our sins being forgiven? As long as you're on this side of the dirt, God's mercy endures. He never will say: I can't forgive that; I won't provide that; you can't leave that problem here. Nope. His mercy is everlasting. The diamond mountain is completely worn away before He runs out of mercy.

That's pretty much what the end of verse 5 says not just about the Lord's mercy but about His truth. This too endures literally "to generations and generation." The truth that God has separated your sins from you as far as east is from west on the back of Christ; the truth that He's made your scarlet sins as white as snow by the blood of Christ; that He has thrown your sins behind His back into the bottomless lake of eternity for Jesus' sake, is as true for you as it was for the first generation of Christians and will be true till the very last. You know the expression: for mercy's sake? For mercy's sake! I haven't seen you in years! Oh for mercy's sake! Would you let me finish my story? It's considered a mild oath and as with most things like that it's a corruption of Biblical truth. Literally Psalm 100 ends with: "For mercy sake give thanks, explode with thanks, squeal with thanks"; because God has mercied us forever for Jesus' sake we can overflow with thanks. That's the versicle and response that begins the Thanksgiving of the Divine Service outside of penitential seasons. I say: "O give thanks unto the Lord for He is good" and you say, "And His mercy endureth forever."

We began by observing that people prefer actual food to a recipe for food. Likewise, thanksgiving is preferable to instructions about how to give thanks. Augustine said in a sermon: "Your praise of Him is like food: The more you praise Him the more you acquire strength, and He whom you praise becomes the more sweet" (NPNF, 1, 8, 491). But this can't be faked. At least let's be as wise as the 8-year-old who when asked to return thanks said, "Won't God know I'm lying about the broccoli?" Yeah, what about the illnesses, the losses, the deaths, the fractiousness of last year. The Lord can't be singing that Dick Van Dyke ditty: "Gray skies are gonna clear up, / Put on a happy face." Can He?

Our merciful, truthful Lord would have us be Habakkuk's not Pollyanna's. Read how Habakkuk, faced with the invading Babylonians who are going to do unimaginably terrible things to Jerusalem, ends: "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior" (Hab. 3:16-17). This is where Ps. 100 goes too: "Be thankful unto *Him*, and bless *His* name." This is Luther: "...one must trust neither in temporal nor in spiritual goods, but through temporal and spiritual things in God alone. So one does not look at air and light but *through* air and light at an object" (LW, 10, 299). So, tomorrow we won't see a recipe, but may we see through the food or lack thereof on our plates. May we see Him even as we actually do tonight at this Meal. Amen

Rev. Paul R. Harris
Trinity Lutheran Church, Austin, Texas
Thanksgiving Eve (20221123); Psalm 100