

***Let Us Worship And Bow Down (IV):
In Joy***

Bible Reading:

Psalm 100

John 15: 1-17

PREPARED BY
KEN GEHRELS
PASTOR
CALVIN CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH
NEPEAN, ONTARIO

I'd like to invite you to go back with me, for a moment, to the opening of our service this morning. We read these words -

Psalm 100..... follow along (p.682)

1.. *Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.*

2 *Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.*

3 *Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.*

4 *Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.*

5 *For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.*

Here's a holy invitation to hurry on up to worship.

Don't wait.

Don't pass it up.

And don't come indifferently.

Come....

Shout for joy..... joyful songs..... enter with thanksgiving..... praise.....

There's a challenge waiting for us here, isn't there:

Make the worship that we engage in here at Calvin Church **joyful**.

As usual, the Bible doesn't leave us to flounder and flub our way towards some sort of half-baked answer.

It gives the challenge - joy-filled worship - and then provides the needed background and direction to make it happen. You'll find that in verses 3 & 5.

Verse 3 gives the foundation on which we can build joyful worship.

Verse 5 provides the driving force to keeping worship joyful; the engine for joy-filled worship.

Know, says verse 3..... *know that the Lord is God*.

The old Hebrew word for *know* is a word that means *solid truth* - in other words, "*bank on it; build on it*" truth - absolute truth.

You may be aware that there is a huge movement underway in Canada today which tries to tell us that there is no such thing as absolute, take-it-to-the-bank truth. You think what you think; I think what I think. And whatever works will function as truth for each of us.... even if it's very different.

It's the key understanding of *Post-Modernism*. You can't nail down ultimate, definite truth; there is no such thing, says the Post-Modern thinker.

Which is relatively easy to work with when you're dealing with the unseen – with values and morals, or teaching about God. Because we can't nail it down with our senses, we try to convince ourselves nothing is absolutely factually true.

Much harder to say that about stuff we see - it's **true** that each of you came here this morning. That's just the way it is. End of story. It's true that the World Trade Centre towers are no more. You can't say - "*Well, they're down if you think they're down. And if you think they're still standing - well, that's OK, too.*" You simply can't say that. It's nonsense.

I want to challenge the idea that truth only works for what you can see and measure. Reluctant though we may be to admit it, there **is** absolute truth beyond what we can measure or sense.

There **is** truth beyond science and math.

Psalm 100 tells us that the ultimate truth on which to build our lives is the truth that God lives, and this God created all that lives - us included.

Beyond creating us, He claims us. And He cares for us, takes a protecting interest in us as a shepherd takes a protecting interest in his sheep.

Truth statement - **know it**, people at Calvin:

We.....

matter....

to.....

God!

AND

The Creator to whom we matter is good;
His love is a love that never quits;
the commitments He makes He keeps forever.
You can take that to the bank.

Wherever you go,
and whatever challenges or victories,
storms or sunny seasons,
growth periods and times of decay -
whatever you face
you face it with your life firmly in the care of, and under the watchful gaze of this faithful, good,
loving Creator to whom you belong.
Let that be the foundation for joy, and joyful worship in your life!

Now compare that with what is getting pushed into our face with increasing pressure over these pre-Christmas weeks.

Joy - where does it come from? What keeps it going?
I want to submit to you that in our day and age we are making a fundamental error; there is a huge confusion, a terrible swap that has occurred.
We've become confused and blurred the distinction between
joy
and
pleasure.

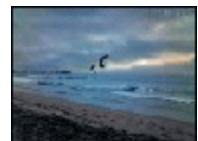
Can you think of a time when you've experienced real joy?

I've asked that question of a variety of different people. And while the results aren't scientifically reliable, 3 % 19 times out of 20 and all that stuff, I keep hearing things like -



- good food, gatherings with good friends: yeah that's joyful

Or, as someone named Laura said, when she thinks of joy, she thinks of the last time that she was at the beach, lying in the sun under a blue sky, listening to the waves.



"But," she said as she thought about it a bit, "you know, that was pretty fragile joy. All it took was a few clouds and the joy seemed to disappear. It could change so quickly."

Laura had joy and pleasure mixed up.

Sometimes we mix them up - joy and pleasure - when we come to worship.

Some of us find real pleasure in the sound of a well-played organ. Others can't help but think, *"funeral."*

Some find their spirits begin to soar when a guitar is strummed. Others listen to the same sounds and their spirits beginning to sour. *"Noise"* they say.

We like responsive readings... We *don't* like moments of quiet.

We like passing the peace.. We *don't* like coming forward for communion.

.....Just don't let anybody mention country music!

What we're talking about is what **pleases** us; what **tastes** good.....

And when we let that begin to drive the agenda, before we know it we're treating the holy event of worship like some sort of Sunday buffet brunch where we may snack from - a nibble here and a nibble there - depending on if we like the menu for the day, or the chef. And if we don't, no problem, we'll stay home or go to another religious restaurant.

And none of this is what Psalm 100 is referring to when it talks about worshipping with joy.

There's a passage in the bible that says:

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thes 5:16-18

Joy, apparently, is something that runs deeper than our tastes, deeper than the clouds or sunshine of the moment.

Joy is far deeper than pleasure.

Pleasure is a fool's-gold look alike of joy. Not that there is anything wrong with it. Pleasure is a real, and often a good experience. Let's face it - eating smoked salmon on wheat wafers beats 99¢ tuna on Wonder Bread; it's a real pleasure. But it doesn't last.

The taste of the salmon fades from your palate; just like sounds of the great concert eventually die out; or the car's leather seats, which are far nicer to sit on than plastic, develop a crack; or the hockey game comes to an end.

Joy -- far deeper than pleasure --

Joy.....

....is that deep and lasting sense
that there is something **right** about life;

Joy is the sense that, no matter what the immediate circumstances, life **IS** worth living; that "it is well with my soul."

Someone has defined joy as "*a deep delight in life.*"

[Davis "Joy" in *Evangelical Dictionary Of Theology*].

Read Psalm 100 again - and listen to its invitation to worship in that light.

Come to worship, my fellow believer, knowing the truth that you are surrounded by strong arms of love;
divine arms;
arms driven by a holy heart -
-the heart of God that makes a covenant of love with you.

Can you let your mind, your soul, your life rest, enveloped in the great Covenant love of God?

A love you don't have to earn;

A love you don't have to perform to a certain level in order to keep;

A love that in gracious mercy is simply, freely given to you.

The Bible tells us in Romans 8:

What can we say? If God is for us, who can be against us? Certainly not God, who did not even keep back His own Son, but offered Him for us all! He gave us His Son – will He not also freely give us all things?..... I am certain that nothing can separate us from His love:

*Neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world above nor the world below -
there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.*

THAT'S what brings joy -- the deep delight which lasts -- into worship.

No guitar or organ; no quiet or noise; no artwork or reading will bring that.

Instead -

You walk into this room and see the cross at the front, you hear words, and you take part in actions which remind you that Jesus has sacrificed all for you that you may live forever;

Jesus gave Himself up that you would become a precious child of God.

And you look around at all these other people and realize that you're not alone. You have family – faith family.

You belong –

in heaven.

and on earth.

You have a home.

And suddenly, as the Spirit of God anchors these absolute truths deep into your heart, form doesn't really matter so much.

Being with Him matters.

And being with His people matters.

All of it gift — a holy gift into our lives.

A gift to which we can respond with humble thanks.

In joy.

In worship.

I want to really have you anchor this teaching in your heart.

To help peg it down, let's work with one more piece of scripture; words of Jesus as He teaches His followers; words found in John 15:1-17.

Before we read it, though, let me describe the lay of the land - the direction in which that passage moves. It'll help you make sense of it.

When He spoke these words, Jesus was probably walking through the hills just outside Jerusalem. He was headed towards a garden on the Mt. of Olives. It was the night before his death on the cross.

The area where he walked was full of vineyards.

They probably headed right by one, and Jesus seizes on that as a teaching moment - points to or grabs a stretch of grape vine as an object lesson.

And he says that as much as each shoot of this grape vine needs to be connected to the central stem in order to live and produce grapes - so equally much do we need to be connected to our Heavenly Father.

We need to be connected to God through a relationship with Jesus.

Apart from Jesus our lives are on a dead-end track.

We need to remain in the love of God.

We remain in that love, says Jesus, by living out His commandments.

When we live in that command of His, we find joy growing up in our lives.

And then Jesus gives a concise summary of what that commandment is which He wants us to live out in order to stay connected in a vibrant, joy-developing relationship with Him.

I'd like you to locate that commandment as we read.
It's mentioned twice.

John 15:1-17 p.1218

Were you able to follow the chain of this passage?
Get the main point - life is found only in Jesus Christ.
That's the central truth.

Then notice these tidbits laced through Jesus' words:

v.9 - I **love** you.
v.15 - You are my **friends**
v.16 - I have **chosen** you

That's the way it is – nothing we do to earn or deserve it.
We simply need to accept it; to stop fighting and allow ourselves to rest in it.
Remain in it.
And then line up our actions to complement this amazing grace truth.

Did you catch how we line up our lives?

Notice that there's not a long string of do's and don'ts which we have to meticulously follow.
Just one simple statement.

Did you catch it as it came from the lips of the One who here in John 15 was soon to head to the cross to pay the price for sinners? Did you catch it?

Love each other.... verse 12 and verse 17.

Simple - and yet so deeply profound.

*I have told you this so that my **joy** may be in you and that your **joy** may be complete.* (v.11)

Someone once said, JOY is "**J**esus first, **Y**ourself last, and **O**thers inbetween" - J... O... Y...
There's a lot of truth to that.

Joy is inextricably linked to our love for others. We cannot possibly experience joy when isolating ourselves from the rest of God's people. We cannot experience God's love when isolated from the love of God's people, or when holding unloving attitudes towards others.

That's the truth.

Hold a grudge, refuse to extend yourself, hide within a little shell around your life, and you will find joy a scarce commodity.

Love only can grow when it is shared.

Give love away and you will find it growing in your own heart. And as that love grows, the joy of God will grow.

Try to greedily keep the little love your heart knows at present, hoard it from others, and you will soon find it evaporating..... along with the Joy of the Lord!

Love, you see, is like a river.

Dam it up, don't let it flow through, and it turns stagnant. It begins to stink.
It must flow on in order to remain fresh and clean.

What does this have to do with Psalm 100?

The measure in which we will be able to worship the Lord joyfully
- real joy -

is the measure with which we can share love with those around us.

The deep and lasting delight that we find in the presence of God is tempered by the care and grace and forgiveness and acceptance which we allow ourselves to first receive from Him; and then flow through into the lives of other pew dwellers here at Calvin and folks we encounter beyond.

It's as simple as that.

And yet..... as challenging.

One wag said,

"To dwell above with saints we love,

Oh - that will be such glory.

To dwell below with those we know,

Well - that's a different story."

God is calling us today to **not** let it become a different story.

But to let the love flow.

Receive His gracious care. Believe that He forgives and accepts you.

Then turn to those beside you - accept them.

Get to know them.

Open your life to them.

And as you do - the worship experience here at Calvin will grow and deepen in a delight far deeper than style or form.

It will grow in joy -

the Joy of the Lord.