

Psalm 100  
There's Always Some Good News Out There  
Rev. Jonathan P. Cornell  
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Good morning Church! It's good to be with you today. I wanted to begin with a little reminder for you all that in just three short weeks we will resume gathering together in person...with a few modifications. Take a look.

### Video

It has been a long and challenging time, keeping distance from one another and moving our activities to digital gathering spaces. However, as has been the case since it began, when the church faced persecution or difficulty of one sort or another, instead of giving up, it adapted. It went underground, it modified its rhythms to continue to bear witness to Jesus even when it had to do so covertly, discreetly, or digitally. And I am proud to say that the result of this time together remotely has been, for the most part, resounding success. We are certainly better for it, and are equipped to face the new challenges ahead.

So, once again, starting July 5<sup>th</sup> we will resume in-person gatherings, we will limit our gathering to just worship from 9:45-11am, with worship starting at its normal time 10am. We'll have sanitizer at every door, limited seating available in order to maintain distancing, we encourage you to wear a mask but will not require it, music will be led by our team here in the front of the sanctuary and we welcome you to hum along or sing with a mask but ask that you minimize singing as it is a way that the virus can spread rapidly. And for those who choose to continue to worship from home we will continue to make our videos available to you on YouTube, only now they will be live streamed. And we will also continue to make each week's message available on the radio on 105.9 The Bash.

Clearly there is much for us to consider as we navigate this time together, not only as we respond to the necessities of health preservation, but we are also navigating the most challenging social crisis of a generation. It feels like a long road ahead of us, doesn't it? I know the daunting feeling of navigating long, hard roads, and from my experience there is one thing for the journey that is an absolute must, worship. Full throated, communal, focused and attentive worship. So this morning we are going to go to the songbook of the scriptures for what I believe is one of the greatest hits.

Wherever you are, I want to invite you to stand with me out of reverence and respect for God's Word, unless you're in the car—which would be difficult—and listen to the words of Psalm 100.

**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, he 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.**

**Point: Is it right for us to talk about exuberant worship in a moment like this?**

Psalm 100 during Covid seems to go like this: Shout to the Lord . . . via Zoom. Enter his gates . . . online. Come before him with joyful songs . . . in your living room.

Just doesn't quite cut it, does it? It doesn't seem to have the punch of the original. Yet, in the schedule of readings that correspond with the church calendar year, called the Lectionary, this is the Psalm assigned for this week. In the midst of a Pandemic and a renewed call to social change and healing in our nation, Psalm 100—one of the most jubilant and worshipful of all Psalms is the what's given to us. Hmm?

It's tempting to look around and think, this isn't a happy time, this isn't a time think about making joyful noises, and entering with thanksgiving. Are we blowing sunshine, whistling in the dark? Is now really the time to call for global praise? Is now a moment to ask people to shout to the Lord because we are the sheep of his pasture? Can we praise God even in times of lament? There are plenty of lament psalms available to us in the Hebrew Psalter. Should we go to one of those instead?

Or is there something formational and foundational happening as we sing and pray and meditate on words like these at times like these?

The truth is that we need to be equipped and fueled for the mission of mercy, truth, justice, and love that God gives to us and through us. We need to be fueled and built up I know I've used this image before we are like an aircraft carrier. Our vision for life and for ministry here at WPC is not that we would be everything to everyone, not that we would be this community's one stop shop for all spiritual and physical need. But that we would be a place of refuge, relationship, and refueling. Like that aircraft carrier that is set in the midst of the mission, and is present for planes to fly down, recalibrate, relate, and refuel, and then reenter their mission—the life and purpose for which they were created, out there.

**Point: Worship equips us for mission/reconciliation**

Just a few weeks ago we celebrated Pentecost Sunday, the day we remember the giving of the Holy Spirit to the Church. Jesus is risen, he ascended, and then the Holy Spirit came in power, equipping the church with tongues of fire and Jesus' presence to go into Jerusalem, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth proclaiming the news of the resurrection—a job that belongs to Jesus' people until he returns.

In the Church's calendar year, the fiery tongues of Pentecost are signified by the liturgical color red. Immediately after Pentecost we move into what we call Ordinary Time (Green Time). And we will be in Ordinary Time in our calendar year until the end of November when we begin the season of Advent, the season of waiting and preparation for Jesus' arrival. I thought it was funny, this week a friend asked the question on social media: if Green is the color of Ordinary Time, what's the color of Unprecedented Time?

From a theological perspective ordinary (green) time represents the long period of waiting, anticipating, preparing, even longing for the Second Coming of Christ. From Pentecost until his Second Advent, it's the long, slow, prayer filled, tear soaked, praise fueled journey from resurrection, to ascension, to vocation, to consummation. Perhaps Psalm 100 is the perfect place to begin/continue our time of anticipation Jesus' return in the midst of difficult times.

**Point: How do we bring clarity to the noise, framework for making sense of it. Worship.**

Because the reality is, these are confusing, hurting, disjointed times. How do we make sense of it all when so much of it is so confusing and challenging? How do we make sense of systems of injustice

that are 400 years old and woven into the fabric of our communities and nation? How do we make sense of the struggle we face with loved ones or children who are caught in cycles of harmful behavior to themselves and others? How do we make sense of a pandemic, that we could have never predicted, and has now decimated so much of our society and economy and threatens to rear its head yet again?

This week while waiting for a meeting to begin I had a chance to sit with a woman who was here to see one of our ministry partners Hands of Hope. She was in a painful situation because of the choices her husband had made and felt trapped, wounded, vulnerable. And I encouraged her that she was doing just the right thing, coming here to talk to someone. But I also encouraged her to seek out the words of Scripture that tell her unequivocally who she is and whose she is. I told her that she belonged to Jesus and he loved her, and that she wasn't responsible for healing or saving this person. When we are confused and hurting, we need a framework to make sense of our lives. God's Word and our Worship are that framework?

Eugene Peterson tells it better than I can when said it this way: When a person is confused and things refuse to fit together, she sometimes announces a need to get out of noise and turbulence, to get away from all the hassle and "get my head together." When she succeeds in doing this, we call that person "put together." All the parts are there, nothing is left out, nothing is out of proportion, everything fits into a workable frame.

As I entered a home to make a pastoral visit, the person I came to see was sitting at a window embroidering a piece of cloth held taut on an oval hoop. She said, "Pastor, while waiting for you to come I realized what's wrong with me—I don't have a frame. My feelings, my thoughts, my activities—everything is loose and sloppy.

There is no border to my life. I never know where I am. I need a frame for my life like this one I have for my embroidery." How do we get that framework, that sense of solid structure so that we know where we stand and are therefore able to do our work easily and without anxiety? Christians go to worship. Week by week we enter this place, compactly built, "to which the tribes ascend," to get a working definition for life: the way God created us, the ways he leads us. Week by week we make a joyful noise to the Lord, we serve the Lord with gladness, we come into his presence with singing! We come to worship to know where we stand.

You see when our minds and our hearts are loose and sloppy, and without a framework it is easy for us to forget that which is true, not just about our own selves, but that which is true of all our brothers and sisters. We can forget the fact that we, and everyone else around us are image-bearers, created in Christ's likeness, when our lives are loose and lacking direction or framework.

That is why we all need good news, and to make our daily discipline attending to the truths of God's Word that tell us that there is good news in our lives—even when we're standing in the valley of the shadow of death. We have a shepherd who made us, we are his, and he is leading us into broad pastures, even though the road we're currently on is rocky.

The actor John Krasinski (Jim Halpert of "The Office" TV fame) hit on an idea just as the global lockdown started to happen in March to produce a little weekly online program called "Some Good News." It became something of a sensation. Soon people all over the world were doing mini-versions of the show themselves for friends and neighbors even as many people started posting

videos and stories to the “Some Good News” social media pages hoping they might actually get onto the show, which many did. Krasinski’s tagline for the show has basically been to remember that even when times are tough, there is always some good news out there.

Such heartwarming stories do not banish all sorrow but they keep us going with something we all need: hope. Inspiration. A reason to get teary-eyed now and again for good reasons instead of merely sorrowful ones.

To state the merely obvious: if John Krasinski and company can do it, the church surely can. We have not just *some* good news but we are the custodians of *the* Good News that just is the Gospel. And the Gospel assures us that although the Son of God had to get dragged through the mud and the muck of this ugly world to do it—indeed, the Son of God had to go clear to hell itself to do it—Jesus Christ did win the victory. Songs of thanksgiving and the entering of God’s courts with praise are all still possible because the Lord Jesus died and rose again.

As John of Patmos, writer of Revelation, experienced in a grim time of exile in his own life, God can pull back the curtain of history for us to reveal the heavenly choruses of praise that are going on right now and that are, in fact, never-ceasing. That’s what John saw on that otherwise desolate island: not visions of what *will be* but a glimpse of what *is right now*. Choirs of angels and saints singing “Worthy is the Lamb!” Right now. Not what the Kingdom will be like one day, but right now. Not what you life can mean, or experience one day, but right now. Not what God says or thinks about you one day when the work on you is done, but right now. The gospel passage paired with Psalm 100 this week is Matthew 9-10, in it Jesus proclaims “The kingdom of heaven is at hand!” That kingdom is not future but is real today.

And so perhaps equally real is the need to sing Psalm 100 with everything we can muster from quarantine, from our homes, on our Zoom feeds, and as we go out and about into our fragmented, grasping, hurting society. So yes, as I said at the outset of this article, at first glance long about now in early June 2020, Psalm 100 seems to sound all the wrong notes vis-à-vis the mood many of us are in.

Or maybe it’s the other way around: given the mood we are all in, perhaps Psalm 100 sounds all the right notes.