

PSALM 100

A Psalm of thanksgiving.

¹ Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.

² Worship the LORD with gladness;
come into God's presence with singing.

³ Know that the LORD is God.

It is God who made us, and we are the Lord's;
we are God's people, and the sheep of God's pasture.

⁴ Enter the Mighty One's gates with thanksgiving,
and the Holy One's courts with praise.
Give thanks to the Lord, bless God's name.

⁵ For the LORD is good;
God's steadfast love endures for ever,
and God's faithfulness to all generations.

If you have grown up a Presbyterian, next to Psalm 23 and maybe Psalm 121, Psalm 100 would be very well known. Often called the "Old 100th" and a hymn in our hymn book for well over 100 years (# 65 in our current hymn book), this psalm has captured something at the core of our spiritual identity. And what is that? Thanksgiving!

But here's the thing about thanksgiving. We hear about it all too often and we're reminded to offer it regularly. And some of us are better than others in expressing it in some way (with words, a card, a note, or some gift). But is there a way thanksgiving may be an essential component of our spiritual growth?

Enter a man called John Calvin. For those long steeped in Presbyterianism or in other forms of the Reformed tradition (e.g. Dutch or Christian Reformed), John Calvin would be well known as the "father" of this brand of Protestantism with a stature equal to Martin Luther. Calvin was French by nationality, but once he espoused the new Protestant faith (as instigated by Luther among others), he was a persecuted refugee welcomed by the city of Geneva (Switzerland), along with many other religious refugees. In Geneva, Calvin soon became a leader of a congregation of refugees, and in time, the leader of the Protestant movement emerging out of Geneva. He even started a seminary there and a young John Knox, also a religious refugee, studied with Calvin and took the faith he learned in Geneva back to Scotland where it grew like wildfire into what became "Presbyterianism." "Presbyter" is the New Testament Greek word for "elder" and

expresses the form of church government in Presbyterian churches. We are governed by elders chosen by the congregation. The minister is also an elder, but a “teaching” elder rather than a “ruling” elder like others. Armour Heights has about 20 elders, and over the next few years you will witness the election of new elders as longer serving elders will rotate out.

But back to thanksgiving. One thing that Calvin taught about thanksgiving in relation to God is that God being the fullness of creational life needs nothing from us. Hence, Thanksgiving to God expressed should lead to loving service and generous sharing with our neighbour (what you would offer to God, offer to your neighbour). At the same time, Calvin also developed worship services for the new Protestant movement that privileged the psalms for singing. And psalms that prioritized thanksgiving and praise were perfect because they expressed the core purpose of worship: to praise and thank God for God’s goodness, faithfulness and steadfast love. God didn’t “need” such praise and thanksgiving, but God welcomed it as a gift from a loving and sincere heart.

But one more thing about Calvin. He had a hard life. Besides persecution, he suffered the death of his wife and child from the plague, and he himself had severe health issues (in a time before modern medicine and pain management, his salary and health benefits included a case of strong wine per month for ‘medicinal’ purposes 😊). Thanksgiving included all those things that make life liveable, comforting and even joyous: good friends, good wine and the genuine, joyous and consoling fellowship of healthy spiritual community. But at the heart of it all, there was the practice of prayerful and intentional thanksgiving. Calvin, like many others, discovered how thanksgiving as a practice changes the brain chemistry and activates positive currents to counter the negative thoughts and depressive realities of life.

What about you? How do you practice thanksgiving? Is it something built into the rhythm of your life? Can the recitation of Psalm 100 among others be included in such practice? What about the people around you? Do they know you are thankful for them?

PRAYER: We thank you, O God, for every good gift in our lives has its source in you, the author of love. Despite the many challenges that have come and may come, and despite the struggles we may be undergoing at present, we commit or re-commit ourselves to practice thanksgiving, and to be intentional about it before you. May you find us and flow through our minds and hearts. May you empower us and fill us with a deeper and ever-more abiding peace. May we taste a new fullness in being alive at this time of life and may we entrust our lives to your care into the future and into eternity... In Jesus’ name; Amen.