

Psalm 100 A Psalm of thanksgiving.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he that 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 for ever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

John 4:27-30

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, ‘What do you want?’ or, ‘Why are you speaking with her?’ Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ‘Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?’

They left the city and were on their way to him.

“Put Your Pencil Down”

Rev. David Dalke

October 19, 2008

Well, they left the city, and the reason they left that city is because there was an event that was taking place down the road. Because a man named Jesus had been travelling from the south to the north, and he had to go through Samaria to get to Galilee with his disciples. He was tired, he was hungry, he was thirsty, and so he stopped outside the city of Sychar, at a well, and the well is called Jacob’s Well. And he stops there, and he’s relaxing, and this woman from the city of Sychar, she’s been milling around with these people, they’ve been all talking and all kinds of things, they’ve been visiting about who won the Friday night rock-throwing contest, and they’ve been talking about what they’re going to have for supper, and they’ve been talking about who’s going to run the government and the city, and they’re having all this wonderful conversation, how they’re going to home-school their kids.

And then, all of a sudden, she’s the one that leaves the city and goes out there to the well to fill her jar, and sees Jesus out there, not recognizing him, but only noticing that he is of Jewish descent. She greets him and he says, “Would you mind giving me a cup of water, while you’re drawing water for your jar?” And she says, “What are you doing talking to me? You know, Samaritans and Jews don’t get along.” And then he says to her, “You know, this water you’re drawing is for your thirst, but I have living water. I have water that you’ll never thirst. You drink of the water I have for you....” and she’s just so confounded with that, what does that mean? And then he says, and I think he’s just sort of setting her up, setting her up, he says, “You’ll never thirst. Now, go get your husband and bring him here, and let’s have him enter into this conversation with us,” and she says, “I don’t have a husband.” He says, “You’re right, you don’t. But you have had five husbands.” “Wow,” she says, “How did you know that? Are you a prophet? Are you a prophet?” And then they start to talk about worship, and in talking about worship, she says, “So where do we worship? Do we worship in the mountains, or do we worship at

the temple in Jerusalem?” and he says, “You worship wherever you are. You worship in spirit and in truth. All you have to do is be truthful in your worship of God, that’s what you do.” And then he looks at her, and he’s been putting these hints out all along, and he says, “I am the Messiah.” She puts the jar of water down, and she runs back to the city of Sychar, because she is so amazed. And she looks at these people and she says, as our Scripture says, “This can’t be the Messiah, can it?” She said, “He told me everything about me. He must be a prophet, he told me things that I didn’t even know about myself. We talked about worship, we talked about where to worship, he told me about living water, he said he had water that I would never thirst again, I wouldn’t have to come to the well any more.” And they ran out of the city to find him, to find him, that they too might worship him and worship with him.

In the Old Testament, one of the reasons that I think God wanted those Hebrew people freed from Egypt, from slavery, is because, he said in Scripture, notice the Scripture, “Set my people free, that they might worship me. That they might worship me, set them free.” Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. Be passionate. Love God with every fiber in your body.” That’s what Jesus told us.

Now you know, my Mom grew up as a Methodist, and Dad, I’ve mentioned him before, you know, he was this ornery, dyed-in-the-wool Mennonite fellow, and he and Mom then married, and one day they were at the Mennonite church worshipping, and Aunt Sadie, who was Dad’s sister-in-law, his older brother’s spouse, Aunt Sadie was also dyed-in-the-wool, but her dye was a little darker and her wool was a little thicker, she reached over to Mom and took her hand, gently, mind you, and said in her German accent, “Katherine, Katherine, are you saved?” And Mom said, “Well, I guess so.” She didn’t know what to say. It wasn’t her tradition. It wasn’t her background. She hadn’t been raised that way. It ultimately was probably not her language and probably not her theology, when you think about it. And she used to tell me that story, she’d say, “I didn’t know what to say to Sadie. My goodness, she was so passionate about that, and she just was so caring for me, and I didn’t know what to say.”

And I started getting in touch with that when I sang in that quartet at Friends University, and we were three Quaker fellows and me, this Mennonite-Methodist guy, and we sang in churches and barbershop festivals, we had a great time. We called ourselves the Fish Quartet. It’s kind of silly, when I think about it now. A quartet, you know, two tenors, the baritone and the bass, but we would introduce ourselves, it didn’t matter where we were, “We’re the Fish Quartet, we’re really glad to be here. We have first tuna, second tuna, (it was really stupid), barracuda and bass.” I mean, you know, it was just kind of dumb when you think about it. We’d introduce ourselves, and by the way, you’re laughing louder than most of those people did, whenever we... and I always thought, “oh, don’t do the Fish thing again”. So we were singing this night at a Quaker church, first time we were out, and Carl introduced the first number – we were going to sing four numbers – and he got up there and he was just passionate. He praised God for his voice and for being there that night, and he was grateful, and we sang, and then we came to the second number and Kenny got up, he was our bass, and he got up and he just thanked everybody, “I praise Jesus” and “I praise God,” and “I’m grateful for the Bible,” and then the third number

came along and Stan introduced it much the same way, very grateful and thankful for his voice, and for us being there, and we started to sing that number, and as we 're singing, I'm saying to myself, I still remember this, and my hands get clammy when I think about it, I remember saying "We have one more number, and I'm the only one that hasn't spoken." And we finished, and I froze. I just stood there, and I started to think, "These guys have been giving testimonies. They were passionate about what they were saying. Testifying." and I thought, "Golly, the only time I've ever testified was in a small claims court, and I won. I won, I was passionate then, but I thought, what do I say, this isn't my history." I did not know what to do. And Stan put his hand in the small of my back, and as he did, he whispered in my ear and he said, "Say something" And I have no idea what I said. All I know is, as I got older, I started thinking, we all passionately worship in our own way. We come to this sacred space, we come to the sacred place, we come to this sacred time in history, this day, this moment, this hour, and we do it in our own way, and we reach out for that which is authentic and which is real and which is caring, and which is stimulating, and that's what we do, and we all do it the way it works for us. We go to a place that will transform our lives. We find that place that, if our souls are hurt, we can find healing for our souls, and we find that place where joys are restored. That's what it is. We come to the synagogue. The synagogue literally means the world. To bring together, to bring together all of us, each in our own way. Each in our own way.

Well the church was about four hundred people. It had a reputation in the Methodist conference of being stiff, not changeable, they hadn't taken in a new member hardly in years, I mean they just sort of existed, and I might say, it was an all Caucasian church, and they asked me to come and preach on Race Relations Sunday. This Caucasian guy in that church on race relations Sunday. I don't think we call it that any more. I think we call it Human Relations Sunday now. But then it was Race Relations. But to their credit, they invited the choir from across town, from Saint Mark's United Methodist Church, and it was an African-American church, and their choir came. And they were behind me, and I sat there, and they sang three numbers, and then I was to get up and preach. Well, they started, and as they sang their voices rang, to this stiff congregation. And they started to clap, the choir. And they moved, and they were singing.

You know, I think, when James and our choir, you know he says to us he prefers that we stay on pitch. I've also heard him say – the door's there if you need to leave – I've also heard him say that he prefers that we sing the right notes. I think that's fair. That's fair, yes. But he's also said, that if we sing the wrong notes, he would also prefer that all of us at the same time sing the same wrong note, so you'll think that's how it's written.

So they sang, and they clapped, and I looked out at the people, because I was right there, and what I saw, I saw some of these people moving. They were moving, and I saw them smile, and then I saw a couple of them looking up, kind of heavenward. There was something going on there electric, and I could hardly get to that pulpit fast enough. I pounced out of my chair when they finished that number, and I grabbed both sides of that pulpit, and I opened my mouth, and some fellow in the very back of the church stood up and said, "Let's have another number." And I said, "You bet." And I sat back down there, and they sang again. They let go. They let go, and when those people left Sychar, when

they walked out and left that village in search of the Messiah, they had to let go, because they were going after something more than themselves. They were seeking something greater than themselves, and when you do that, you let go of something. What is it? You let go of your ego, you let go of the belief you're in charge, because you're not totally in charge. God has created us with freedom, but God is still there. And they, as they walked out of that town, they had to let go of their egos.

That was a problem before Jesus was born, and it's probably a problem now, that the great religions of the world, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and the religion of Israel, monotheism the one God, the reason there was so much spiritual illness and the reason there was so much violence, is because people wouldn't let go. They wouldn't let go. They wouldn't believe there was something greater than themselves, and the sages of the day said, "Only when you can let go of your ego and worship the God who has created you in the first place, will there be less violence and less spiritual illness."

What did we sing this morning? What did the choir sing? "Lord, Hear My Prayer." But that wasn't really the way it was. I think it was, "Dear Lord. dear Lord, please, please hear my prayer." When? "In the morning, when I rise. It's your servant, Lord. It's your servant. Oh, dear Lord, please hear my prayer." Let go, let go. I'm going to close with this. Vic and I sat under a professor at Drew, his name was Carl Michaelson. Doctor Michaelson was a theologian beyond theologians, he was a caring, unbelievable man, who died in a plane crash the year after we graduated. A great loss. But I took a prayer seminar from him. It was a prayer seminar, eight of us in there, we met for three hours once a week. We'd sit around, and we'd pray. Dr. Michaelson would critique our prayers. He would critique the prayer. This day it was Ryan's turn to pray, and he started to pray. We bowed our heads, and I could hear Dr. Michaelson's pencil as he started scratching on the table on his tablet as Ryan prayed, and he was scratching the critique, and then all of a sudden, in the midst of the prayer, it was so passionate, so heartfelt, so deep, all of a sudden there was another sound, and it was the sound of Dr. Michaelson putting his pencil down. He put his pencil down. When Ryan said "Amen," we all looked up, and Dr. Michaelson still had his head down, and as he raised it with misty eyes, he said, "Ryan, I could not critique your prayer. Instead, I prayed your prayer. Today," he said, "I have experienced God."

Well, those folks left. They left Sychar to go out and worship with all their minds and their hearts and their souls, and may that be our experience this day. Amen.