

Trinity Sunday/Psalms 100
June 11, 2017
Haven Lutheran Church
Readings: John 1: 14-17; Psalm 100

Grace to you and peace from our Triune God — Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen

“Liturgy” usually means a format or order of a ritual. Each Sunday we follow a liturgy for worshiping our Lord. Each time I’ve gone to watch the Hagerstown Sun, I’ve been fascinated by the liturgy of the baseball game. The crowd’s attention is gathered for the games beginning with a brief musical clip or announcer’s enthusiastic welcome, immediately followed by the announcement of each team’s players. It has a similar effect as the Lutheran a “Lord be with you” with the applause being like “Also with you.” Then to properly lead us into the game, everyone stands — players and fans of both sides; hats off; some with hands over their hearts --- for the National Anthem. “Play Ball!”

Since 1941, when organ music first debuted at a Cub’s game in Chicago’s Wrigley Field, music has become a part of the baseball liturgy. Clips of music are played to rouse the crowd’s enthusiasm and get them in the game with set responses, like: [Do horn imitation] “Charge!”; [do drum pattern] “We will, we will, rock you.... We will, we will rock you!” There are real or digital sign fireworks and clips of music to celebrate home runs, like “Na, na, na, na.... Na, na, na, na... Hey, Hey, Goodbye.” There are other music clips to mock the opposing team or clapping and loud cheers to try to rattle the opposing pitcher. There’s a song for the seventh inning stretch ---- “Take Me out to the Ball Game!”/“Thank God I’m a Country Boy” — the last inning, coincidentally, for beer to be sold. At the end of the Sun’s game, both teams go out on the field to do high fives with each other, like a passing of the peace.

Why all this sports allusions? It’s where Psalm 100 took me. Listen to it calling worshipers to get ready to participate in something wonderful. “Make a joyful noise to the Lord...Worship the Lord with gladness.... come into his presence with singing.” The psalmist is not just giving directions but trying to urge and move the crowd toward an event in which they will participate. What event? An encounter with the Almighty God who is good and steadfast — right here, right now in the temple or church, right now in the prayers, Scripture readings and songs.

During the week when my seminary peer group led chapel services, our adviser, Professor Featherstone, would stand in the lobby like a street hawker. He would loudly say things like, “Now is the time to worship!” “Come to the House of the Mouth!” “Bring your songs and sorrow to the Lord, brother!” “Step into the river of praise, sister!” It put me off at

first but then I was a bit envious. His enthusiasm was genuine and infectious. He didn't want others to miss a chance to be with God and God's people. He challenged me, as the 100th psalm is challenging us. When we come to worship, it's not just a habit, passing time or paying some kind of dues. Each time we worship we come into the presence of the Triune God — Father, Son, Holy Spirit — the creator of all, the Savior who hung on a cross, holding nothing back, showing God's ways and love, and the Spirit who is God in us and still at work redeeming the world. THAT, to me, is simultaneously amazing, wonder-filled and a bit scary. God is here. God is with us. God has things we need to hear... things we need to know to live fully and faithfully. When we enter worship, it's a marvel the Pentecost wind and fire don't blow us off our feet. God is here! "Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise." What could we do to help us remember that wonder and truth each Sunday when we gather? In some parts of the world, we might take off our shoes. If it was like a hockey game, we'd run through hoops of flame as we enter. Maybe for us, I'd suggest we let the pure, undeserved blessing of God and God's gifts wash over us when you first sit down or during the prelude. Take a moment to touch the wonder of it all and ready your hearts to receive with joy whatever it is God wants to offer you that day.

It's not just baseball that has its athletic liturgy Pastor Heather Entekin tells the story of her husband attending a football game at his alma mater. There were 108,000 fans in the Penn State Stadium, mostly rooting for their home team. With about 2 minutes left to play, the outcome was hanging in the balance. Pastor Entekin's husband called her on his cell phone to hear the cheering. Everyone on one side of the stadium yelled, "WE ARE!" and everyone on the other side of the stadium yelled back, "PENN STATE!" Back and forth, it went – WE ARE.... PENN STATE, WE ARE.... PENN STATE!" Then, because this is a very cultured and polite crowd, at the end the first side yells, "Thank you." And the other side answers, "You're welcome," and then you know the cheer is over. When the final buzzer sounded and the game was over, Penn State beat Michigan State by four points. The crowd erupted out of the stadium in triumph, energized and ready to tell anyone about the game and their great team.

Pastor Entekin wrote, "I got teary listening to all those people yell. There's something about thousands of fans shouting out who they are, claiming their heritage, their colors, their mascot, their school. There's something thrilling about shouting that declaration of belonging."

"Psalm 100," she continued, "shouts about an even bigger kind of belonging. Psalm 100 says, 'WE ARE — GOD'S OWN.' It might not be as catchy as the Penn State cheer, but it means a whole lot more. We are — God's own. We are God's people. There is

nothing more important than that. We are God's own. And not just Penn State or Maryland fans. Not just Lutherans, not even only Christians. Not just Americans or its Allies. The Lord is God of all the earth, made us ALL, loves us ALL.¹ This we are to know in our very depths, the psalmist proclaims, ---- We are God's own God is here. God is with us. THAT is who we worship with gladness and songs, tears and laments. Because God's goodness and love endure forever. The Lord's faithfulness to God's own is steadfast and reliable. That is the who and the why of worship.

Our Lutheran liturgy may not seem as dynamic as a baseball or football game. Though I have harbored a secret desire to write a liturgy using music clips like they do at a stadium. Announce the worship leaders and choir and have them run into their positions in the sanctuary. Start worship with "We Are Family" or "Celebrate Good Times — Come on!" Instead of YMCA, the kids would lead us in E.L.C.A. When the reader or pastor steps up the congregation encourages them with "charge!" or — "Let's go, Nancy, let's go! [clapping pattern] Don't worry. I won't do it.

But the 100th psalm is calling us to remember that our worship is to be spirit-filled. Maybe not as loud as a Penn State stadium during a home game, but spirit-filled all the same, because we are entering an encounter with the holy, living God. People, who arrive anticipating God's presence and activity, bring something different to worship, a spark of the Holy Spirit. When you come to worship expecting God to speak and reach out to you in a meaningful way, it readies you to hear and see God during worship. And when that anticipating spark of Spirit is multiplied, the fire of worship and love is noticeable, even to visitors. I know there are Sundays when we may arrive empty, tired, angry or sad. Even then — maybe especially then — we need the Psalm 100's reminder "to enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise" for we belong to the Lord who is greater and more reliable than whatever circumstances are twisting us in knots. In a good or bad place, pour a sincere heart into your responses [and singing] in worship. It's not exactly the same kind of energy we use to cheer players, boo an ump or get to our feet for a scoring play. Yet surely, we are as excited about a meeting with God as we are about a game. How would that translate in our participation in worship? Well, don't be afraid of a little enthusiasm. After all, WE ARE – GOD'S OWN.... WE ARE – GOD'S OWN.... WE ARE – GOD'S OWN.... Thank you — You're welcome. Amen.

Linda M Alessandri 6/10/17

ENDNOTE

1.Rev. Dr. Heather Entekin, "Psalm 100: Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow" as posted on www.sermonwriter.com