

Celebration Sunday!

Psalm 100

This is Celebration Sunday! What are you celebrating today? Why are you celebrating today? Crossroads Church is celebrating the completion of the first major phase of our capital campaign. I'm celebrating that we're here and what we've done to get here.

To get to this Celebration Sunday, we've been taking some pretty big steps. We are looking hard for a building of our own to buy. We're working hard to clarify who we are and the direction we're moving. We are building enthusiasm for the mission of this congregation. We're finding a focus for our vision: to grow spiritually, institutionally, and numerically in order to be more effective in our congregational life and ministry. In this process, we're meeting two major challenges: the need for confidence and the need for money.

I am so proud of you. Your great participation in this campaign, including your financial commitment, shows how much confidence you have in each other. We are gaining a new sense of confidence in each other. And money? The dollars you have committed this past week to the capital campaign have truly been an "over and above" gift. Your pledges to the regular giving offering have actually gone up for next year! That's close to half a million dollars in capital campaign contributions and budget pledges. You are amazing people. Congratulations!

Psalm 100 is a song of celebration. The psalm was sung as a processional into the Temple in connection with a thanksgiving ceremony. Hear the first stanza (NRSV):
"Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness.
Come into God's presence with singing.

Another translation (Anchor Bible) says it like this:

Hail Yahweh, all the earth!
Serve Yahweh in happiness;
Enter his presence with joyful song.

In other words, come into church happily and joyfully, expecting to serve God and to experience divine presence.

The Message says it like this:

On your feet now. Applaud God!
Bring a gift of laughter
And sing yourselves into God's presence.

Stanza two:

Know that Yahweh is God
"He made us and is the Omnipotent"

We celebrate God as creator and as all-powerful. God is all-powerful, yet God's power is not coercive. God's power is not to let us slip away. God's power is to always be connecting "cosmic God reality" to the core of our personhood. Nothing will ever separate us from the love of God that we experience in Christ Jesus. That we can

perceive God's presence and respond to God's love is what reveals God's power in our lives.

Stanza three:

The worshipers "enter [the temple] gates giving thanks, [the temple] court with songs of praise. [Their goal is to] give thanks to YHWH and bless the Lord's name".

The Message says it this way:

Enter with the password: "Thank you!"

Make yourselves at home talking praise

Thank God. Worship God.

Stanza four:

"For Yahweh is good:"

There are three virtues traditionally ascribed to God. God is beautiful (glorified). God is true (worthy of trust). God is also good (loving).

The psalmists says that God's love is "from eternity" and God's faithfulness is "to every generation". We can have faith in God because God has faith in us. That is something to celebrate!

I'm celebrating the strides we have made so far. Let me ask you honestly, "Who really thought this would happen?" "Who is surprised? Even just a little bit?" Who (besides me) is delighted? There is so much to celebrate on this Celebration Sunday. To be sure our celebration is on the right track, I want to ask a version of that old question, "What would Jesus do at a time like this?"

How would Jesus celebrate? We learn from the Bible that Jesus often celebrated by eating, drinking, singing, sharing stories with friends, and hanging out with unsavory characters. We can do that!

Jesus almost certainly celebrated with dancing and with hugging and kissing. He also shared quiet and intimate times with his friends and he spent quiet and intimate time in prayer. That's how Jesus celebrated.

We're celebrating a lot of success in the capital campaign. But what else should we be celebrating on this Celebration Sunday? What did Jesus celebrate?

Well, he celebrated some unusual things like: being poor and hungry, weeping, and being excluded. Of course, he also celebrated the community of his disciples, the love of God that filled him, and the new life of the Spirit that changed peoples lives. He celebrated what aligned him with God and kept him on track with God's ways.

Author C.S. Lewis, in the second volume of his science fiction trilogy *Perilandra*, introduced some eternal beings called the Eldila who, when they appeared in the world seemed to stand at a slant. This was because they were aligned with the center of the universe rather than with the vertical of any particular world.

It's great to be happy and celebrate good times. Today, we celebrate successful work. We also celebrate the totality of God's blessings to us. Thank-you, God, for what aligns us and keeps us aligned with the nature of your ultimate truth, and with what we know of you through Jesus.

The vision we have of our building and our future as a congregation rests on our commitment to this body of people. It's a sign of our faith in each other. The commitment you demonstrate is a sign of the trust each of us has in the movement of this congregation to become all that it can be.

Ultimately, the vision we celebrate today rests on a commitment to the sure presence of God who is with us always. We place our trust now and forever more in that presence and in that providence. So, we celebrate a faith and a church that keeps us aligned with the nature of God and connected to the Spirit. We celebrate what God continues to do in our midst, through our lives. So, let's celebrate!

Make a joyful noise to the Lord!
On your feet now, applaud God
Let us celebrate and sing for joy!