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Psalm 95
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Dancing Down the Aisles in Praise

One of the tenants of Young Life is that they believe it is a sin to bore a kid with the Gospel. The truth is that Jesus is anything but boring. It's just often we in the Church don't tell the story in a way that is compelling to young folks. So at Young Life Club when the Gospel is proclaimed, Young Life Leaders do whatever it takes to remove barriers to get kids to listen.

In the middle of club it is not uncommon for one of the leaders to yell out, "30 Second Dance Party!" Immediately, some really cool music comes on that they love and everyone gets up and dances their hearts out for...you guessed it...30 seconds. It's amazing how those short 30 seconds can completely open a person's heart to hear the message.

I shared this trick with a friend of mine who is a 7th grade science teacher in Camas. So he decided to give it a try in his classroom. One day during the first few weeks of school, he played Earth Wind and Fires song September and invited the kids to get up and dance...for 30 seconds. They loved it!

Do they expect that of their science teacher? No. Do you think that opened the kids up to wanting to learn more about science that day? Absolutely.

In the same way, "A Presbyterian missionary in Ghana told an interesting thing about the Presbyterian church there. Presbyterians are the largest Christian group in Ghana, established over a hundred years ago by the Scots. So one would imagine that their worship service is very much like a Scottish Presbyterians.

With one exception.

When it comes time for the offering, people dance as they bring their offerings forward. They really get down. They take their time, too. The offering could go on for a long time because they are dancing all the way down the aisle. 'How interesting,' This missionary observed. "The only time in the service when they smiled was when they were giving their money."¹

Do you think that changes the nature of their giving? You bet it does!

The Apostle Paul said, "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."² I think we could take some lessons from our African brothers and sisters in Ghana. Amen?

¹ "Whom Do You Serve?" Preaching Today, Tape No. 110.

² 2 Corinthians 9:6

Our scriptures today come from Eugene Peterson's The Message which is a modern paraphrase of the Bible. The first story is from 2 Samuel 6:14-22 when King David was bringing home the Ark of the Covenant back from the Philistines. The second is from David's Psalm 95:1-7.

Listen now for the Word of the Lord.

2 Samuel 6:14-22 The Message by Eugene Peterson

12-16 It was reported to King David that God had prospered Obed-Edom and his entire household because of the Chest of God [which was called The Ark of the Covenant]. So David thought, "I'll get that blessing for myself," and went and brought up the Chest of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David, celebrating extravagantly all the way, with frequent sacrifices of choice bulls. David, ceremonially dressed in priest's linen, danced with great abandon before God. The whole country was with him as he accompanied the Chest of God with shouts and trumpet blasts. But as the Chest of God came into the City of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, happened to be looking out a window. When she saw King David leaping and dancing before God, her heart filled with scorn.

17-19 They brought the Chest of God and set it in the middle of the tent pavilion that David had pitched for it. Then and there David worshiped, offering burnt offerings and peace offerings. When David had completed the sacrifices of burnt and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of God-of-the-Angel-Armies and handed out to each person in the crowd, men and women alike, a loaf of bread, a date cake, and a raisin cake. Then everyone went home.

20-22 David returned home to bless his family. Michal, Saul's daughter, came out to greet him: "How wonderfully the king has distinguished himself today—exposing himself to the eyes of the servants' maids like some burlesque street dancer!" David replied to Michal, "In God's presence I'll dance all I want! He chose me over your father and the rest of our family and made me prince over God's people, over Israel. Oh yes, I'll dance to God's glory—more recklessly even than this. And as far as I'm concerned . . . I'll gladly look like a fool . . . but among these maids you're so worried about, I'll be honored no end."

Psalm 95:1-7 The Message by Eugene Peterson

1-2 Come, let's shout praises to God,
raise the roof for the Rock who saved us!
Let's march into his presence singing praises,
lifting the rafters with our hymns!
3-5

And why? Because God is the best,
High King over all the gods.
In one hand he holds deep caves and caverns,
in the other hand grasps the high mountains.
He made Ocean—he owns it!
His hands sculpted Earth!

6-7

So come, let us worship: bow before him,
on your knees before God, who made us!
Oh yes, he's our God,
and we're the people he pastures, the flock he feeds.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

First we will look at this story in 2 Samuel of how David celebrated in worship. Then we'll dive deeper into what Psalm 95 says about how we should worship. And finally, we will learn more about what we can do to make our times of worship more joyful as we express our thanksgivings to God.

In Old Testament times, before there was a permanent temple, the Ark of the Covenant moved around from place to place in a tent. The only problem with having it being so portable was that it was also easily stolen. And as the story goes, the enemy of the Israelites, the Philistines, stole the ark from God's people.

The Ark contained two stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments which Moses received from God at Mt. Sinai. These commandments told God's people how they were supposed to live in right relationship with God and with one another. But due to human sinfulness, God's people continually broke the law, which meant that blood would have been shed as a punishment.

The high priest would make animal sacrifices on the top covering of the ark on what is called the Mercy Seat. The blood of the sacrifice would cover the mercy seat and act as a screen for the broken law. So God would look upon the faithfulness of the sacrifice and forgive the people of their sin.

So having this ark in their possession was a very big deal. Because it communicated God's grace and forgiveness for them.

This story is about how David reacted when the Israelites recaptured the Ark of the Covenant and brought it back to home to Jerusalem.

Notice that the first thing David did was sacrifice a bull and a fattened calf. Now that may not mean much for us today. But essentially, it means that he gave generously the best of what he had because he was so happy that the ark had come home. Think of it this way, David acted in the same way that the father is so overjoyed that his wayward son had returned home in Jesus' Parable of the

Prodigal Son. After the sacrifice was made, the meat would have been prepared for a communal feast.

Next we see how David dressed in a linen ephod, danced before the Lord with all his might. The Hebrew word for might is *oz*. It means strength, might, or power. In other words, like the Presbyterians in Ghana during their offering, David really got down! Notice also how David's celebration enticed everyone else to let go and celebrate too. "He and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouts and sounds of trumpets."

Then David shared his blessings with all of the people of Israel, giving each person in the crowd a nice sized piece of meat, a loaf of bread, and a cake of raisins. Then everyone went home to continue their celebrations.

An interesting side note is that your bibles don't mention the piece of meat directly. It only implies it as part of the fellowship offering which was the only sacrifice that was shared with the worshipers. Somehow the translator instead added a cake of dates. But that is not actually how the Hebrew reads. It says, David gave them each one *esphar* which in Hebrew is a measured portion of meat. Not dates. How they got dates, I do not know.

The fact that David wore a linen ephod symbolized his role not only as king, but as high priest. That he danced before the Lord dressed as high priest seemed out of character for a high priest and scandalous to some.

In fact, Michal, who was Saul's daughter, the former king of Israel, did not approve of what she saw. "How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would."

David's shameless celebration stirred up negative emotions within Michal as she was reminded of all that she had lost as a former princess. Instead of celebration, she was sad, angry, and offended.

I understand that importance of being sensitive as we celebrate knowing that others might not be as joyful as we are. But that is not our fault. David shows us that if our motives are right and that we are rejoicing before the Lord, then we shouldn't hold back. Our opponents's issues are with God, not with us.

Which is a good thing to keep in mind if we are hit negatively about something in worship. We should ask, why has this stirred up such strong emotions within me? What might God be trying to say to me through it?

David nailed it. He told Michal, "It was before the Lord [that I was celebrating], who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his household when he appointed me ruler over the Lord's people Israel."

Let's move on to David's words in Psalm 95.

"Come let us sing for joy." The Hebrew word for sing comes from the root word *ranan*. It means to be joyful greatly, make to rejoice, or cause to shout for joy.

“Come let us shout.” The Hebrew word for shout is rua. It means to sound the alarm, make a joyful noise, shout for joy.

“Let us come before him with thanksgiving.” The Hebrew word for thanksgiving is yadah. It means a choir of worshippers, a confession, or a sacrifice of praise. The Hebrew word for song is zamir. It means a song to be accompanied with instrumental music like as with a psalm, singing, or song.

“Come let us bow down in worship.” The Hebrew word for bow down is kara. It means to bring down low, cast down, or fall. The Hebrew word worship is shakah. It means to fall down flat, humbly beseech, or do reverence.

“Come let us kneel before the Lord our maker.” The Hebrew word for kneel is barak. It means to abundantly bless or congratulate.

“Come let us hear his voice.” The Hebrew word for hear is shama. It means to be attentive, carefully, consider.

Psalms 95 also says we should not worship with harden hearts. The Hebrew word for hardened is quasha. It means to be stiff necked, overly grievous, or ungrateful. It also says that we should not quarrel with God nor test God in the way Michal did that day with David.

Considering all that we’ve heard so far this morning, how then can we, in this season of thanksgiving, thank God for all that he has done.

We can come to worship with open hearts and open minds. We can be ready to hear God’s word and then to obey it. We can expect to have an encounter with Jesus. Did anyone hear the burning bush as you entered the church property say, “Good morning, I’m glad you’re here?”

We can thank God through our offerings. Remember God loves a cheerful giver.

We can verbally thank God with our prayers.

And finally we can thank the people in our lives who have blessed us in some way.

This morning we’d like to give you an opportunity to thank God during our offering. In your bulletin this morning, you had a piece of paper that said, “Thank you God for....” Write down exactly what or for whom you are grateful. And then instead of having the ushers hand out their offering bags as usual, we will invite you come, dancing down the aisle, and placing your thanksgiving cards in the offering basket along with any regular offerings or planning giving cards you’d like to make.

If for some reason you are not able to make it down the aisle, then simply raise your card in the air and an usher will come by and collect those for you. Still you can dance in your heart, tap your feet, and sign along with the music with joy.

Let us pray.

Amen!