



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

August 26, 2018

“I Was Glad”

(Psalm 122:1)

Rev. David K. Groth

“I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord!’” (Ps. 122:1).

**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

Collect: Almighty and merciful God, defend Your Church from all false teaching and error that Your faithful people may confess You to be the only true God and rejoice in Your good gifts of life and salvation; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

David wrote, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord!’” (Ps. 122:1). How about you? When the clock told you it was time for church, were you glad?

Maybe I’m off the mark. Maybe today you really *did* want to come to the Lord’s house, conceivably because of a real spiritual hunger for God’s Word, or because of a personal sorrow, or perhaps because you really wanted to hear those words of absolution. If so, wonderful and good!

Knowing human nature, however, my guess is more of you came out of the force of habit than out of spiritual hunger. More of you came out of a sense of duty to God than out of the desire for his Word and Sacraments. More came out of a corporate sense of responsibility to one another, or to set a good example for the children, or because mom and dad made you come, or mom and dad would come back from the grave if you didn’t. These are the things that often bring us to God’s house, not so much for God’s gifts of Word and Sacrament.

I remember as kids, the mad rush before church. Brother Paul always took way too long in the shower, so by the time my turn came around dad was already in the car chirping the horn. The chirps eventually turned into an angry half note (we lived in the country and didn’t have to worry about neighbors). And sometimes when we came running out, we were sent right back in to put on dress shoes and a better shirt. And once or twice mom passed the comb into the back seat of the car and told Andy to comb my hair. He had a grand time of it too, plowing little furrows in my scalp. As we rushed in from the church’s parking lot, we were not always glad to go to the house of the Lord.

Today Christians are gathering for worship in secretive house churches in North Korea. Others might be gathering for worship under a tree in the horn of Africa. Others in a big Russian

cathedral with swirls of incense floating past the icons. Others in a store front mission church in the inner city. We share so much with other Christians. Paul talks about “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all;” we share so much with other Christians around the world. One thing we also share is a common reluctance and disinclination to come to the Lord’s house for worship. We cannot always identify with the David’s gladness. We may even begin to wonder if this means we are sham Christians with sham faith, because real ones would surely be happier and more enthusiastic.

Sometimes we may even look for someone to blame for our lack of enthusiasm. If I’m not glad about worship, it must be someone’s fault. If the sermon were only a little more interesting and humorous, thought provoking and relevant, and above all, shorter . . . then I would be glad to come to the house of the Lord. Some pin it on the liturgy . . . if it were higher with kneelers and lots of chanting and maybe even a little incense: then I would be glad. Others say if only it were more upbeat and casual and contemporary, with drums and guitars, then I would be glad. Others set their sights a little lower; if only my two year old would stop putting his fingers in my nostrils, then I would be glad to come to the house of the Lord.

Some, in search of spiritual gladness, will bounce their membership around from one church to the next, like a game of ecclesiastical pinball. Making the rounds . . . looking for a place that will make them glad.

“I was glad when they said, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord!’” wrote David. . . Whatever is wrong with us that we are not glad?

No new or surprising answers: the primary problem has been and will always be sin. If you and I were not glad to come to the Lord’s house this morning, the primary reason is not out there somewhere; it’s closer to you than the fabric of your clothing. Remember, our spiritual resting state is no friend of God. Paul writes, “The sinful mind is hostile to God” (Rom. 8:7). Our sin has broken that vertical

relationship with God, so that we fear his wrath and feel guilty before him. By nature, we don't want to have a whole lot to do with the Lord. Our sin has also broken and battered those horizontal bonds with fellow Christians, so that we may find this one or the other to be tedious or annoying or grim or untrustworthy. Just know they may be thinking of you that way too.

If we're not glad to come to the Lord's house, instead of looking for the guilty party out there some place, maybe we should be getting on our knees in confession of sin. If you think about it, just hearing the words of absolution alone should be enough, to draw us to the Lord's house with gladness.

Remember, the resurrected Jesus breathed on his disciples and said, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." And the Bible teaches that where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation. Therefore if we take all that seriously, just hearing the words of absolution alone ought to be enough, it ought to be enough to make us glad to come to the Lord's house.

I think another part of the problem is we often walk into the Lord's house with a consumer mentality, like walking into a movie theater, or a restaurant. You know, you get those little cards that ask you: Was the restaurant's appearance attractive?

Were you promptly seated by the host/hostess? Was your server friendly, knowledgeable and professional?

Much of our public life out there in shops and restaurants, much of our public life we think of ourselves as passive consumers who rate the experience. Then when we come to church we bring that mentality with us and passively wait to have a pleasing worship experience, all the while judging and questioning how it could have been done better. The organ was too fast and loud on that one, too slow on the other. Sermon was too long, too dull, too dark, too serious.

But worship is not a consumer experience. First and foremost, worship is where we hear God's Word and receive

his Sacraments. Luther insisted that's how you judge a church. Is the Word of God preached and taught in its truth and purity? Are the Sacraments administered rightly? If that's happening, according to Luther, then you are in the right place. Those are the marks of the church. Everything else is peripheral. What is central is whether the Word is preached, and the Sacraments are administered. Remember that if and when you move and it's time to find another church.

In the meantime, don't enter the narthex like you would the movie theater waiting to be entertained. It's the Lord's house, and he is prepared to give you gifts. Therefore it's a different mentality altogether, and it's written right above the narthex doors: "Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his gates with praise."

Thanksgiving and praise, because our Lord is the Lord who serves. Jesus Christ came into the flesh not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. On the cross he offered himself as a spotless sacrifice for the sin of the whole world and won forgiveness and salvation for all.

Seated now at the Father's right hand, he's still serving us. He graciously serves his Church with the gifts of salvation. Worship is not about us serving Him. It is about him serving us. That's why we call it "Divine Service," from the German Gottesdienst. In the Divine Service, our Lord is serving us with his holy Word and Sacraments. Through these means he delivers to us forgiveness and salvation.

That's why the psalmist writes, "I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord." It wasn't for the entertainment value or for the networking possibilities for work. It wasn't for the organ verses the praise band, or the praise band verses the organ. It was to receive the gifts of forgiveness and salvation that every one of us needs.

- At Holy Baptism the Lord puts his name on us, pours his Holy Spirit into our hearts and rescues

us from sin, death and the devil.

- Through Holy Absolution he pronounces his forgiveness to us again and again.
- With his Holy Word written in Scripture and preached into our ears, he proclaims his faithful love for us through all the joys and sorrows of life.
- In his Holy Supper he gives us his own body and blood to eat and drink as a priceless gift to forgive, nourish and strengthen us.

Gottesdienst. Divine Service. His service to us calls forth our service – in sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise to him and in loving service to one another. So we don't sit here like passive lumps waiting to be entertained. We respond with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. We confess all that God has done for us, declaring his praises.

In worship, our song of praise joins with the song of every saint from every age, and from every place. When we pray "Our Father . . . we're praying for all Christians everywhere." And when they pray "Our Father . . . they're also praying for us. So our praise and prayers today join with those Christians worshiping secretly and quietly in the house church for fear of the police. Our prayers and praise of God joins with those Christians worshiping under a tree in the horn of Africa, and with those Christians in the beautiful Russian cathedral and in the inner city store front mission church.

Worship isn't about being entertained. In worship, the Lord is serving us with his Word and Sacrament, and we are responding with prayers and thanksgiving and praise.

This is the Lord's house. He is the host. It's not made special by us, our piety or friendliness or creativity. It's his zeal to save, his faithfulness, his service, his generosity, his love, his gifts of forgiveness and salvation that makes this a place of Divine Service.

Therefore, "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.'" Amen.

