

SERMON RECAP FROM MAY 25, 2025
6TH SUN. OF EASTER, PSALM 100

Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee”

Sermon by Robb McCoy

In talking about our hymn, “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee,” we are actually talking about three separate pieces of art. The poem “Ode to Joy,” begat Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, which begat “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee.” When we sing this rousing hymn, we are drawing from the artistry of three brilliant minds and stepping into the tradition of the Psalmist who wrote the 100th Psalm.

Joy is an emotion that is difficult to describe without the exuberance of music. Joy is the wellspring of faith. It is the first, most profound, and most human reaction to the understanding of our place in Creation. Psalm 100 - which one Psalms scholar claims is the most-sung psalm in our collection - contains the foundation of this joy.

Psalm 100 is a short poem. In only five verses, it contains seven imperatives. We are told to Shout, Serve, Come, Know, Enter, Thank, and Bless. The middle imperative - Know - is the most important. "Know that the LORD is God - he made us; we belong to him. We are his people, the sheep of his own pasture" (100:5).

To “know” this is more than an acceptance of a certain fact. In this phrase, knowing, is understanding, feeling, internalizing. To “know” in this way is to know something not just from observation or because someone told you, it is to know down deep in your spirit that this thing is true. And what is this thing?

That the LORD is God. Whenever you see the word LORD printined in small Caps in an English Bible, the Hebrew word behind it is YHWH - the ancient and unique name for God that we now pronounce as Yahweh (it used to be Jehovah). The Hebrew word behind our word God is Elohim, which is a title that means more literally The Lord. So, the LORD is God, means more literally "Yahweh is the Lord."

In other words, Yahweh is the Lord, and nothing else is. This is the foundational tenet of Judaism and Christianity. Yahweh - the God of Creation, the God of the Abraham, Sarah, Joseph and his brothers; the God of the exodus from Egypt, provisions in the wilderness, and the Law and covenant with the people - that God is God.



Ludwig von Beethoven wrote the ninth symphony, which is a masterpiece of music composition. The hymn we have today is only 16 bars, taken from the last movement of the 30-minute symphony. Beethoven was inspired by the poem “Ode to Joy,” which was written by Friedrich Schiller. It has similar themes to the words we now sing, which was written by Presbyterian liturgist Henry Van Dyke.

Then move to the next phrase. “God made us; we belong to him. We are his people, the sheep of his own pasture.” When we center this idea - as it is the center of this Psalm - then we have proper orientation in our life and a proper understanding of our place in Creation.

God is God and we are created in God's image. This is the source of our joy. This is why Friedrich Schiller wrote his poem. This is why Beethoven composed his symphony. This is the source of Van Dyke's joy. God is the God of all Creation and God created you and I in God's image.

There are many things that rob us of our joy. Unkind words, rude strangers thoughtless friends, harmful bosses, worries about money, work, or the state of the world. These things can rob us of our joy in the moment. They can hurt our feelings or make us worry or question ourselves or doubt God's goodness. None of these things can have power over us, however, if we can return to the fundamental truth of Psalm 100.

Put verse 3 in the center of your life: “God is God and we are God’s,” and the ripple effect can return our joy. Sing the words of “Joyful Joyful We Adore Thee,” and we can see the evidence of God’s creation all around. We can return to God our Father, Christ our brother. We can return to the mission of God to make progress for the sake of justice and love.

Nothing can rob us of our joy when we understand who and whose we are. That truth is worth singing over.