

**First Presbyterian Church
Southampton, New York
“How to Make a Joyful Noise to the Lord”**

**Psalm 100
Colossians 3: 12 – 17**

May 24, 2015

Both of our Scripture texts for today challenge us, in one way or another, to “make a joyful noise to the Lord.” And the question of the day for us this morning is, how are we supposed to do that? In other words, just what does it *mean* for you and me to “*make a joyful noise to the Lord?*” I was thinking about this question this week, and it occurred to me that we might be helped in answering it by remembering that there is a very big difference between what we might call “*joyful noise,*” and just plain... “*noise!*” And I think you know the difference I’m talking about!

For example, sometimes young children make “noise...” and, sometimes, they make “joyful noise.” Right? “Noise” is when you’re sitting in your living room, stretched out in your Barcalounger, drinking a glass of wine, and watching *Dancing with the Stars*... and upstairs your kids are having a door-slamming, ceiling-shaking, top of their lungs-screaming fight about some thing or other! That’s *noise*... bickering, bellyaching, drowning out the TV and shattering your peace with a no holds barred argument. And when you hear *that* kind of noise, you probably jump out of your recliner, troop up the stairs, and make a little noise of your own to put a stop to it!

“*Joyful noise,*” on the other hand, may be just as loud... and it may be just as intrusive... and it may drown out the TV as surely as a slamming door or a shrieking insult. But when we hear *joyful* noise, we usually don’t set aside the glass of wine, and we generally don’t make the pilgrimage up the stairs, and we probably won’t intervene to make the noise stop! Instead, we usually just smile, turn up the TV volume a notch or two, and make some endearing comment about how great it is that our children get along so well with one another!

And why? Well, it’s because joyful noise isn’t bickering... it’s playing! It isn’t two kids at each other’s throats... it’s siblings joking together and having fun! Joyful noise is cranking up the stereo when their favorite song comes on... it’s laughing out loud at an episode of *Modern Family*... it’s putting an ice cube down each other’s back, and chasing each other around the house with a handful of shaving cream, and tickling each other into submission! Joyful noise is loud! And it’s riotous! And it’s... well, *noisy!* But it’s *joyful* noise because it’s motivated by love... it’s *joyful* noise because it’s the product of happiness... it’s *joyful* noise because it’s an expression of all that’s good and blessed and right between people!

Noise is the sound that life makes when it’s out of whack, and when people are at war with each other. *Joyful noise* is the sound that life makes when it’s healthy... and vital... and hopeful... and full of peace and grace.

Now, that may be an overly simplified distinction, but I believe that the general idea is basically valid. And I think that it’s a wonderful way in which to understand what it means for you and me to render joyful noise to God through our Christian discipleship! And that’s because

we, who are in the church, can also make both kinds of noise, can't we? I mean, history has taught us that, unfortunately, it's very possible to make a lot of just plain "**noise**" in the church, right?

For instance, we know that on our grouchy days we can fight and argue and threaten each other over the most ridiculous trivia and minutiae... and we know that on our self-righteous days we can beat our chests and posture like mad over all manner of pet issues and personal projects and petty agendas... and we know that on our whiny days we can bellyache and complain and feel sorry for ourselves with the best of them!

We know that, as a denomination, our bi-annual General Assembly meetings can sometimes generate a mess of noisy, negative, religion-section headlines. We know that rogue congregations can, from time to time, take off on ill-advised missions to re-write the Book of Order, and **that** creates a lot of noise in presbyteries from coast to coast. And across denominational lines, we know that every time some pastor, or some elder, or some other church leader somewhere winds up scandalized in the police blotter for some bonehead indiscretion, the decibel level goes **up**... even as the church's public image goes **down**!

We hear that unhappy, unredemptive, dissonant noise, and we're distracted by it, and our spiritual growth is stunted by it, and our mission as Christians is compromised by it, and all it seems to do is give us one splitting theological headache! And if **that** were the only noise that we ever heard coming out of the church, then, like a couple of weary and irritated parents who've just had the serenity of their peaceful evening shattered by a couple of bickering children... we, too, would no doubt get up out of our pews, head for the nearest exit, wash our hands of the whole ecclesiastical scene, and say, "*The heck with that! I've got enough frustration in my life already, without the church adding to it! I'm outta here!*" And nobody would blame us...

But the good news this morning is that that **isn't** the only noise that we hear, in and around the Christian church... never has been, and it never will be! The good news today is that, along with all that irritating noise we have to deal with from time to time as a church, we really do hear another kind of noise here, too.

We hear a **joyful noise**... a noise such as our children make when they're playing together happily... a noise not of disharmony and anger and self-absorption, but a noise of praise! A noise of joy! A noise of hope, and grace, and self-sacrifice! A noise which proclaims, loudly and clearly, that the Kingdom of God has indeed come, and it can be found **right here**! We hear noise in this place which tells us that something good is going on... we hear noise which reminds us that something gracious and holy is afoot... we hear noise which proclaims to us that something bigger than all our problems, and more powerful than all our disagreements and more enduring than all our disappointments has come to take residence in our hearts! We hear noise which makes it unmistakably clear that Almighty God is with us!

That's joyful noise! And we hear that joyful noise every time we set aside our personal self-interest and try to love our neighbor as we love ourselves; we hear it every time we renounce the forces of sin and evil and proclaim the reality of God's mercy and grace; we hear it wherever and whenever we gather as the people of God and celebrate the hope, and the joy, and the peace that our God has placed within us! Joyful noise is the soundtrack of genuine Christian community! And it's a sound that our Heavenly Father genuinely loves to hear!

Which brings us back to our question of the day... which is, just how *are* we supposed to make a joyful noise to the Lord anyway? Well, in our lesson from Psalm 100 this morning, the Psalmist reminds us of some of the most important ways in which we generate some really beautiful noise for our God! And two of the most important ways for us to be joyfully noisy are mentioned right off the bat, in verse two. The Psalmist tells us that joyful noise happens when we *worship the Lord with gladness...* and when *we come into his presence with singing!*

Does that sound familiar? It ought to! It's what we're doing today... right now! We've come together in this sanctuary, in the presence of God, in order to worship Him... and while we are worshipping in His presence, we are singing every step of the way! Now, we may not all be in our "A" frame of mind for worship this morning... our thoughts may wander a little from time to time, we may be a bit distracted, we may not feel as close to God today as we would like.

But that's OK... we're all still here to worship, as best we can. And, musically, we may not all be Josh Groban and Beyonce... we may not be able to sing like Ray Sachtleben! Hey, we may not have enough confidence in our ability to stay on key to even sing out at all! As far as I can tell from up here, some of you may be lip-synching your way through some of our hymns! But that's OK, too! The only thing that matters for joyful noise is that we're all here... and we're all lifting our hearts, whether in voice, or just in spirit, to the Lord! And when our Lord hears that sound, no matter how it sounds to *us*, to Him, it's joyful noise! It's the sound of His children, *being* His children... being a part of His family... being together in faith, and in hope, and in love! And *that* is a wonderful, beautiful thing!

But that's not all that the Psalmist has to say about joyful noise... because, in verse three, he tells us that "*It is the Lord that has made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*" Now, you may be asking, "What's that got to do with 'making a joyful noise'?" Well, it seems to me that the Psalmist is saying that it's a joyful noise to the ears of our Heavenly Father, when we acknowledge His Lordship in our lives... and when confess our daily dependence on His grace... and when we orient our lives around the profound and crucial truth that we belong to Him, and not vice versa!

In other words, we make a joyful noise to our God when we pull in the reins of our own self-interest, step down off our various high horses, and humbly seek His will and direction and purpose in our lives! It may not sound like birds singing or bells ringing or a choir of angels in a cosmic harmony... but it does sound like a group of brothers and sisters trying to serve their Lord amid the trials and temptations of daily life... and that, believe me, is sweet music to our Father's ears!

Finally, in verse four, the Psalmist reminds us to "*Enter God's gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name!*" Hey, you want to make some serious joyful noise? Try this approach on for size! Try a simple word of thanks, for everything God has done for us! Try a simple word of praise, for God just being God, and for His making you, *you*, and for the glory of this vast and beautiful universe into which He has placed us!

Try a simple moment of contentment and peace, where there is nothing else to gain, where there is no other rung to climb, and where there are no further tasks to accomplish... and where you can simply appreciate God for who God is... and celebrate all that God has done for you... and simply be grateful for the gift of life in which you are now partaking! This species of joyful noise may be as quiet as a walk on the beach on a summer evening... or it may be as loud

as the laughter we share at potlucks and at ballgames and at backyard barbecues with our neighbors.

We may hear it in the voices of our Sunday school kids as they laugh and shout and run around in their classrooms every week... or we may hear it in the prayers that we share in church, or in the hospital room of a suffering friend... or we may hear it in the proclamation of God's Word, or in the breaking of the bread, or in the cry of a baby as the baptismal water is poured across her head. We make this joyful noise anytime that God's grace is acknowledged, and anytime God's good gifts of life are appreciated, and anytime God's invincible ability to bless is accepted.

Now, I don't need to tell you that this world we live in is filled to overflowing with "noise." It's all around us... we're assailed by it every day. It's up to you and me to put a little "joyful noise" in the air! That's part of our calling as Christians... it's part of our quest as disciples... it's one of the best ways we have to show our God that we're still hanging in there with Him, and that we're glad that He's still hanging in there with us!

So, may we go forth... and in all that we do this week, may we be joyfully noisy! To the glory of God our Father, the Holy Spirit, and our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen!