

**“God is good; his love endures forever”
Psalm 100**

Introduction

1. **Martin Rinkard was a 17th century Lutheran pastor in Germany.** When he was 31 years old he began a church ministry in his home town of Eilenburg, Saxony. He served his church, town and people for 31 very difficult years—during the Thirty Years War from 1618-1648. Some say it was the most devastating war in European history. Germany lost up to 30% of its population; the male population was reduced by half. Swedish invaders destroyed 2200 castles, 18,000 villages and 1500 towns (1/3 of all German towns).

All of Europe fought for 30 years but Germany was especially devastated. The war was horror upon horror with invasions, killing and epidemics that took hundreds of thousands of lives.

Pastor Rinkard served God and his people the best he could. He gathered food that was often stolen. His own family was starving.

1637 was the year of the Great Pestilence. At the beginning of 1637 there were four pastors in town—one ran away; Rinkard officiated at the funerals of the other two. He sometimes conducted 40-50 funerals a day—a total of 4,480. In May of that year his own wife died.

Martin Rinkard was a musician who wrote a hymn for the times in which he lived:

Now thank we all our God
With hearts and hands and voices;
Who wondrous things hath done,
In whom this world rejoices.
Who, from our mother's arms,
Hath led us on our way,
With countless gifts of love,
And still is ours today. ¹

2. **What makes someone grateful when surrounded by suffering?** It is not only a question for 17th century Europe but also for modern Americans and ancient Jews.
3. **The people of Israel suffered too much.** They were enslaved by the Egyptians. They were conquered by the Philistines, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans. Their history is full of famines, wars, epidemics and corruption. Suffering and Jews are almost synonyms. Yet they had a hymn of thanksgiving that they shouted as much as they sang. We don't know when it was written or who wrote it, but it is one of the most familiar and famous songs in the Bible. It is titled, “A Psalm. For Giving Thanks” but numbered Psalm 100.

4. **Psalm 100**

*Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.
Worship the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.*

Know that the LORD is God.

*It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.
For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.*

Call to worship

Psalm 100:1-3

- 1. Picture Jewish pilgrims coming from across the country to the temple in Jerusalem.** They come with all the problems faced by God’s people in every generation. Some are farmers. Some are parents. Some are rich. Some are poor. Some are sick. Some are dying. Some are pregnant. Some are happy. Some are sad. **A liturgist comes out of the temple, stands on the steps and speaks with a booming voice that can be heard above the rumble of the crowd.** He speaks a call to worship:
*Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.
Worship the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.*

- 2. Such simple words yet profound with meaning.**

- It is a call to shout not sing. Frankly, I’m not much of a shouter (actually, I’m not much of a singer either!). Charleen and I are going to the Minnesota Twins home opener at Target Field on Monday—I won’t shout. Not that I don’t care. I’m just not a shouter. But, Psalm 100 is a call to shout even for us non-shouters.
- It is a call to joy, whether we feel like it or not. Joy is a deep sense of well being that transcends happiness. It is actually possible to have joy when unhappy. So, this is a call that lifts us above our circumstances. When life is lousy it is possible to shout for joy.
- It is a call to the Lord. This is the reason. This is the secret. This is the key. When life is focused on God we can experience joy no matter what. This is an invitation to rise above ourselves and circumstances and experience God himself.
- It is a call to “all the earth.” This is most amazing. Israel was a little nation and little nations were assumed to have little gods. In those days every country and tribe had their own local deities—sort of like modern mascots for high school sports teams—important to the local folks but small players in the big picture of things.

The God of Israel was called Yahweh. In our Bibles Yahweh is translated as LORD with all capital letters.

Psalm 100 calls the whole earth to worship Yahweh. The invitation is to Philistines, Assyrians, Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, Africans, Asians and Europeans to worship and praise the God of little Israel. I wonder if some Jews didn’t want to shout because they didn’t want to share. We sometimes feel like that—we want to keep God for Americans rather than invite Mexicans and Moroccans, Canadians and Chinese, foreigners and enemies to know and worship the God of the Bible. But, let there be no doubt that the one God is God for “all the earth.”

- It is a call to worship God with gladness. Worship is to acknowledge God’s worth. The Hebrew word is sometimes translated “serve” because worship includes doing something as well as saying something.

The idea here is that a beloved king has shown up before the crowd and everyone is shouting happy adoration. It’s the sort of thing we have today for some rock stars, famous athletes, prominent politicians or other celebrities. Only this is for God—we shout and worship with gladness because we are looking into the face of God.

- It is a call to sing joyful songs. We know all about joyful singing—it’s our national anthem at the Olympics; it’s “Take me out to the ball game” during the 7th inning stretch; it’s “Happy Birthday” at a 2-year-old’s party. Only these are joyful songs to and for God.

That’s what we do at church. We sing joyful songs to God. I like to look around and watch Christians sing. I love the sound of joy and I love joy on faces. Sometimes there are those who don’t sing when we worship but you seldom see joy on the faces of those not singing.

Last weekend was my first weekend back following five weeks off to recover from spinal surgery in my neck. (Special thanks for so many prayers and expressions of love and concern!) Without being too gross, let me explain that the operation went through the front of my neck which left my throat really swollen for weeks. I was continually hoarse. So, the prospect of preaching at nine of Wooddale’s twelve Easter services was kind of scary. I wondered if I would be too hoarse to talk after just a few services. Of course, it wasn’t just preaching—there were songs to sing in all of those services as well. A few people suggested that I just not sing in order to use my voice less. But I couldn’t do it. Hoarse or not hoarse; voice or no voice—I just couldn’t keep quiet when God’s people *worshipped the LORD with gladness; and came before him with joyful songs.*

3. All this sounds fine but what if we don’t feel like shouting or singing? What if sadness and suffering are so overwhelming that there isn’t much joy or gladness? That guy on the temple steps calling everyone to worship Yahweh gives reasons for this kind of worship:

Know that the LORD is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his;

we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

- “The Lord is God.” This no ordinary celebrity we’re worshipping. This is God. He is the Boss of the universe. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the Creator of everything.

Over the years I’ve met several presidents, one Pope and some famous athletes that I didn’t recognize out of uniform. They are nobody compared to God. They are nothing in rank to the Lord.

Sometimes we modern Americans foolishly think that God exists for us. We pray as if he owes us something. We threaten him with unbelief if he doesn’t do what we want. Are we crazy? The Lord is God! He doesn’t need us. We need him. The Lord is God!

- “It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.” God made us. God owns us. The reality is that we are completely at his disposal whether we like that or not. The very good news is that he takes care of us and watches out for us like a shepherd with his sheep.

Have you seen the CBS TV series “Undercover Boss”? Every week the President of a major US corporation leaves his corner office, takes off his business suit, lets his beard grow, puts on work clothes and goes undercover as an entry-level employee in his own company. The other employees don’t know who he is and it makes for some funny and some emotional moments. At the end of each show those employees are summoned to headquarters where they meet the lowly co-worker who is revealed as the President of the company. They are amazed and shocked. They thought he worked for them. The truth is that they work for him.

It is scary and humbling for them to find out who this really is. But, each week the newly revealed boss gives thanks, encouragement, a bonus or promotion. Because? They are his people, the employees of his company.

- This is why we shout for joy and worship with gladness. The Lord is God and we belong to him. *“We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.”*

4. The liturgist who called God’s people to worship next opens the gates of the temple and invites them to come inside.

Call to thanksgiving

Psalm 100:4-5

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.
For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.*

- 1. Come into the presence of God!** Come with awe and admiration but specially come with thanksgiving. Gratitude is to mark our relationship with God.
- 2. Researchers tell us that grateful people are happier people.** Even unbelievers who are thankful for what they have are happier in life.
Author Nancy Ortberg, a registered nurse, tells about a 14 year old girl she met. The girl was in a dirt bike accident and had her leg amputated. When Nancy met her she was sitting in a whirlpool bath in the physical therapy department. The teenage Christian lifted her partially amputated leg out of the bubbling water and said, “Look at how much I have left!” She explained that the doctors were able to amputate below her knee which made the fitting of a prosthesis easier.² Instead of bitterness over her loss she was thankful for how much she had left.
- 3. Often those who have less are more grateful than those who have more.** Those who have no bread are grateful for a crust; those of us with plenty can complain that the croissant isn’t warm. Those with no car are grateful for a ride; those of us with a new sports car are angered by a scratch.

4. Psalm 100 calls us to thanksgiving but it’s not just a general attitude of gratitude. This is thanksgiving for God.

There is a difference between being thankful to God for who he is and being thankful to God for what he does. This is a call to praise God just for himself. We love him and are grateful for him even if he doesn’t give us what we want. We love him just for himself.

When I was growing up we always had pet cats in our home. Whenever my mother wanted to find the cat she ran the electric can opener and the cat came running. Then the cat would purr like an electric motor and rub back and forth across my mother’s legs. My Mom said the cat had “cupboard love”—the cat loved her for the cans of cat food she kept in the kitchen cupboards.

God wants us to love him, praise him and be grateful to him for himself and not just for the stuff we can get out of the cupboards of heaven.

5. Not that God is not generous—he is! “For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.”

James 1:17

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

6. The wife and young son of a patient at a veteran’s hospital came to visit him.

The boy wasn’t allowed onto the ward so didn’t actually see his Dad. The father had carefully made a wooden toy truck for his son and asked an orderly to take it outside and give it to him while the father watched from a fifth story window.

The boy was thrilled with the truck. He threw his arms around the orderly and thanked him for the gift while his father watched from a distance. He made the truck. He gave the truck. He wanted his son to look up to see him and thank him.

Then the Mom and the orderly pointed to the window. The boy shouted out “Daddy, thank you. Daddy, I love you.”³

That’s us! We know that:

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights....”

“For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.”

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¹ <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Lib/Rinckart.htm>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirty_Years'_War#Casualties_and_disease

Harry Genet, “The Unlikely Thanker,” *Men of Integrity*, March 3, 2000.

² Nancy Ortberg, *Looking for God*, Tyndale, 2008, pages 14-15.

³ Charles Swindoll, *Elijah: A Man of Heroism and Humility*, Word, 2000.