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Y'all Come . . . and Shout, "Glory!"

Psalm 96

It was the summer of 1956. My father was 10 years old and being the eldest of four children, he had those first-child overachiever characteristics. So, one particular Sunday when his family decided to skip church and go to White Lake for the day, he was especially concerned. Back in those days, if you grew up Baptist, there were several requirements to attending Sunday School and among them was the striving for perfect attendance. My father was diligently seeking his perfect attendance pin and that pin was in great jeopardy. So my grandparents, being the parents that they were, made a deal with him. They would stop somewhere along the way to attend a Baptist Sunday School. Well, you would have thought that in eastern North Carolina there would have been a Baptist church on every corner. Not so this day. They managed to find a little white wooden Methodist Church set back from the road. It had its window propped open with "tabacca" sticks, as we call them in eastern North Carolina. When they pulled into the driveway, it became rather clear that my father could say goodbye to his perfect attendance pin. You see, this church apparently, held its worship hour at the traditional Baptist Sunday School hour. When they reached the front door of the church they were greeted by a short, stout, African American woman who through her arms open and shouted gleefully at them, "Ya'll just come on in and shout glory with us!" They were taken slightly aback by her enthusiasm. As they glanced around the room, they saw an amazing sight. People were standing and clapping, shouting, "Amen!" and singing "Hallelujah!," waving their arms in the air. And if that wasn't enough, the greatest surprised happened when their dog Zip lived up to his name. Zip zipped right down the front aisle and joined in the celebration. He reared back on his hind legs and started dancing with somebody's grandmother! True story! I kid you not! A kind, gray-haired gentleman approached my family and said, "Folks, y'all are welcome to come shout glory with us but your dog has got to go."

The invitation of that small country church, "Y'all come and shout glory" is the invitation to all of creation in the context of Psalm 96. Hear these words from The Message translation: Read Psalm 96.

As with most psalms we don't know the origin nor do we know the actual author. As with most psalms, this one has been assigned to King David believing that he used it to praise God as the King above all kings. So what do we know about this psalm? We know that it was written some time after the period of exile. We know that it is compiled of several other scriptures that have been combined to offer us the final form that we have here. We know that it was used in conjunction with the New Year Festival which would have re-enacted the enthronement of the king and might well have included some sort of re-enactment of the Ark of the Covenant's entry into Jerusalem. We know that this was a hymn meant to be sung by a choir in antiphonal fashion. One section would sing the first line and the next section of the choir would sing the next line and so on and so forth. We know that people would have come from all over, all descendants of Abraham, from

various tribes with varying dialects to join in the celebration and in the singing of the hymn. This would have been a holy moment for them. They would have understood the Ark of the Covenant as being representative of God's presence. They knew that God's presence created holiness and they understood one profound truth that most of us forget: God's presence requires our true worship. In Southern terms, they had to heed the admonition of the old woman from the church door, "Y'all come and shout glory!" and that is precisely what they did.

Break to sing Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee

Six parishioners read six headlines from different locations in the worship center:

1. Riot in Rostock, Germany ahead of G-8 Summit
2. Four suspects in JFK bombing plot
3. Woman accused of imprisoning family
4. At least 8 killed in Baghdad mortar attack
5. 18 hospitalized after Maryland prison fight
6. Warrant Issued for arrest of businessman who ran for CMS School Board

We live in a world where shouting glory is fast becoming a foreign idea. Instead, people shout their anger believing that they are right and everyone else is wrong. Their abandonment of kindness for rightness leads them to fighting and to rioting. We live among people who operate out of fear and in their abandonment of love they hold their own relatives hostage. We live in a nation where power and control reign supreme—where people are so desperate to define their own destinies that they wipe out the destinies of others. They have such tunnel vision on self that they become ignorant to anything beyond that tunnel. They are completely unaware of the consequences that affect the lives of others. This need to be right, to have power, to control and this clinging to fear are all rooted in our self-absorption. As such self-absorbed people we come to worship, much like my father came to Sunday School to check off his perfect attendance roster. So, we come to check off our duty of worship with God. When we have this attitude then we are not coming to be changed. God's presence changes us. When we have this attitude we cannot recognize that God is present and therefore we cannot truly worship. God's presence requires our true worship. In our self-obsession, we fail to recognize that like the woman standing at the church door with her arms wide open awaiting my family, so God stands here with His arms open waiting for us to notice His presence. When will we wake up? When? Because when we do wake up, we will realize that God's presence requires our true worship.

Some years ago, I had the pleasure of visiting in a psychiatric ward of a hospital and there I met a man by the name of Harvey. Harvey was in his 50s, divorced and his ex-wife had died since the divorce. He had three children—none of whom wanted anything to do with him. Earlier in his life, he had gone to his minister and his minister had given him a plan for his life. Harvey lived out that plan joylessly. Harvey had had back surgery a few years prior and was still in pain from that. He was now on disability and when I found him, he was mired in depression, suicidal, feeling washed up and useless. He thought that God had turned his back on him. Shouting glory was impossible for him. But, there was an inkling of hope that I saw in Harvey. Harvey seemed to think that if he could do something that made him feel useful, something that made him move beyond himself, then that might put him on a better

track. Harvey was right. He started writing notes to tell people that he was praying for them. Then Harvey actually started praying for them. Once he did so, he began to discover that God had not turned his back on him but that Harvey had turned his back on God. Harvey began to take responsibility for the ways that he had alienated himself and for the blame that he had offered others in his life. Then Harvey began to claim his faith—not a borrowed faith, not something that someone else outside of him had given him—but something that was truly his—a personal relationship with God. In that personal relationship he began to discover that God loved him unconditionally and a peace began to settle into his life. When that happened, he started to realize that he could look on himself with the same eyes that God uses when he looks at us—eyes of love. Suddenly, he started to gain a confidence about himself and then began to look at others with those same eyes of love that God uses. Instead of judging them, he just chose to love them. Harvey began to realize that he was living out the steps of worship as outlined in Psalm 96. He had begun to praise God all of the time—with every breath, in every step—at every moment, no matter what was happening he was praising God 24/7. Then he realized that God had created a remarkable being in him and that he had a duty to offer himself back to God. He realized that he needed to bring the gift of himself and in so doing he needed to put all of his burdens on God and simply follow God. Once he did that, he began to celebrate. Joy began to come forth from the pores of his body and soul. And then, he began to bless God. The text uses the word “bless” and in this context it means to get down on bended knee and to offer gratitude and reverence to God. Harvey began to understand that God’s invitation to come and shout glory had been there all along. That same invitation remains for us to come and shout glory.

Choir sings anthem here

It was a couple of weeks ago that I met with some people in my life who help to keep me spiritually grounded. I don’t know how I would make it through life without them. What makes them so special is that they share the painful, joyful and transforming places of their lives with me and allow me to do the same with them! So, a couple of weeks ago, one couple among our group shared that they had recently been to a funeral. It was a funeral of a man that they thought they had known very well. They arrived to hear the minister tell things that they never knew about him. Who hasn’t had that experience? I know I have. As they listened, they realized that this man had walled off parts of himself from them and that they never got to know the fullness of who he was. What the whole group gathered with us realized was that the church has done the same thing. We are so on the go, doing in service as we provide items and meet needs, accomplishing, meeting and so on, that we don’t stop to BE in service. We don’t stop to find out—where are the joyful places of your life? Where are the painful places of your life? Where are the places that God is transforming you? And so, we fail to be the church. It’s not just St. John’s failing, there are a lot of other churches failing too. We fail to be real and honest with each other. We fail to love each other and to allow others to love us. To this the psalmist says that if we have a peaceful, personal relationship with God then we should be so excited and enthused about what God is doing in our lives that we cannot wait to tell everyone about those painful, joyful and transforming places. If we love others and if we love God then we should not keep our stories of God’s amazing movement in our lives from the people who most need to know us and more so need to

know God. The psalmist says that after we have begun that constant posture of praise and after we have given the gifts of ourselves back to God, after we have celebrated and blessed God, then we are called to take the message to the masses. We must take the stories of God's work in our lives to others who need the experience of God for themselves. If we could do that, the invitation "Y'all come and shout glory" would become irrelevant because everyone would be here and we would all be shouting glory together!

This psalm boils down to two questions both of which I have answered for myself already—yes and yes are the answers and I have to confess that I don't live up to them all of the time. That is my sinfulness! But now, the questions are for you? One, will you acknowledge God's presence in your life and commit to truly worshipping? That means shouting glory, bringing the gift of yourself, celebrating and blessing God. And, two, will you take the message to the masses? All they need is the same invitation that God seeks to give each of us. The invitation of the woman at the church still stands, "Y'all come and shout glory." The invitation lived out in Harvey's life still stands, "Y'all come and shout glory." The invitation of the psalmist still stands, "Y'all come and shout glory." The invitation of God still stands, "I am here, y'all come and shout glory." May we so shout! Amen.