

COME, LET US SING TO YHWH

Hear again the Word of the Lord to His Church on this seventieth day before the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord:

He (is) our Elohe, and we (are the) people of His pasture and (the) sheep of His Hand. Today if you all will hear His Voice, do not all of you harden your hearts as at Meribah; as (in the) day (of) Massah in (the) wilderness, when your fathers tested Me in putting Me to (the) test, though they had seen My work.¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

For many of us in this place, the words of a major portion of the 95th Psalm may sound more familiar than those of any other. They are sung by us a few times a year, particularly during Holy Week, at the Resurrection Dawn service, on National Thanksgiving Day, and on Wednesday mornings when a pastor is not present to celebrate the Lord's Supper. In the Venite, the first seven and a half verses of today's Psalm have rung out in the Church as part of Matins. That "of the morning service" has been sung, chanted, and/or spoken in Christ's Church around the world for some 1,500 years.

For us Lutherans, as Dr. Luther reformed the human created abuses in the Lord's Services almost 500 years ago, Matins was kept. The Venite – the 95th Psalm as the chief Psalm of Matins – was held before God's people as part of "a daily office of preaching, praise, and prayer."² It is a universal order of service which truly enables God's people to fulfill their biblically defined roles as New Testament kingdom priests, offering the sacrifices of Christ's New Covenant: prayer, praise and thanksgiving.³

While in many places, congregations' use of the Service of Matins appears to have fallen off, it remains a time-tested form for receiving God's gifts. It is an order of service which we recommend you make us use of as part of your daily devotions at

¹ Psalm 95:7-9.

² Precht, Fred L. *Lutheran Worship History and Practice*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993, 444.

³ *Ephesians* 5:18-20; *1 Thessalonians* 5:18; *1 Timothy* 2:1; *1 Peter* 2:5; *Hebrews* 13:15.

home, for it is full of the Lord's Psalms. As you do so, you will find the Word of God imprinting the first part of today's Psalm in your heart, with words that begin the chant:

*Oh come, let us sing to the Lord, let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation, Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving, let us make a joyful noise to Him with songs of praise.*⁴

Many of you know that chant. Hear it now more literally rendered:

*All of you come, let us sing to YHWH, let us cause to make joyful noise to (the) Rock (of) our salvation, let us come before His Face in thanksgiving, in singing psalms (or songs) let us cause to make (a) joyful noise to Him.*⁵

First, we note that the Psalm calls all the people of God whom He has gathered to sing to Him as His proper Name reveals Him. That is YHWH, "I AM Who I AM," the God Who calls all things to be, the creator God. Second, the Psalm moves us to see Him as also our Savior God, the Rock whom we have heard declared in the wilderness of Rephidim (from today's Old Testament reading). That Rock is none other than Christ Jesus, as the New Testament makes abundantly clear when St. Paul says:

*And all the same spiritual Drink drank: for they all drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them; and the Rock was Christ.*⁶

With that in mind, we turn back to the Psalm knowing to Whom we are addressing. Now we are called to come before His Face. That, without the Rock of our Salvation, would be a terrifying prospect. The Scriptures declare no one can look upon the Face of God and live.⁷ That is to say, apart from the Faith of the Christ no one can remain in the Presence of God for a moment without being consumed by His holiness.

Yet, those who are in Christ are certainly freed to come before the Face of God. For in Christ, we behold the Face of God clothed in sinless human flesh. Therefore, as the faithful, as you, approach God in Christ, you are able to offer to God the sacrifices

⁴ The Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. *Lutheran Service Book*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006,

⁵ *Psalm* 95:1-2.

⁶ Cf. *I Corinthians* 10:4.

⁷ *Genesis* 33:20-23, etc.

which please Him. Our day's Psalm, the everyday song of Matins, lets us know what those gifts are that we are free to bring: *thanksgiving, in singing psalms (or songs)*...

Again, we are learning to give back to God that which He has first given us – His Word. We are then able to fulfill the encouragement of the 95th Psalm: *let us cause to make (a) joyful noise to Him*. The faithful, as they sing, chant, and/or say God's Word back to Him, are able to cause to make a joyful noise.

This concept of joyful worship is so simple: God speaks to His people through Word recorded in the Scriptures; His people speak His Word in the Faith; and a joyful noise of thanksgiving is given back to God. That is one reason why the Psalms have played major roles in Christian worship throughout the of the New Testament era.

On the other hand, we want to be careful if we think that we can improve on giving back to God from His gifts. After all, when you get to know someone better, you learn how to give them expressions of love, thanks, and adoration in forms, manners and words which they have declared they appreciate. Like children who grow up in households wherein parents express manners as expectations for giving in to requests, we too learn as children of God how He wants to be addressed. For example, young males in households like mine learn quickly that to ask Dad or Grandpa for something with words such as, "I want a fruit snack," will receive the response, "What is it like to want?" When the boy learns to ask with the "magic word," in a pleasant manner, "May I please have a fruit snack," he will likely be told, "Why, yes you may have one, and you can even pick one out for yourself because you know where they are kept."

Our Psalm continues as many of you have learned to chant it in the Venite:

*For the Lord is a great God and a great king above all gods. The deep places of the earth are in His hand; the strength of the hills is His also. The sea is His, for He made it, and His hand formed the dry land.*⁸

Those words are a smoothing of these more literal phrases:

⁸ The Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. *Lutheran Service Book*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006, 220f.

For El (is the) great YHWH and (the) great King above all elohim. (In) Whose Hand (are the) depths of earth and (the) heights of mountains (are also) His, Who (has) the sea, for He made it, and His hands formed (the) dry land.⁹

That translation makes it clear to Whom the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving in the singing of Psalms is to be addressed. It begins with the Word, El, which is a generic term for “god.” That may be any being who is a ruler on earth, in the heavens, or under the earth. Yet, which God is to be faced is declared by His proper Name, YHWH. His name is not only great – for He is the Creator of all, but, as the Psalm declares, He is the ruler of the ruling ones. That means that God’s people are offering their sacrifices to the Great I AM, He who is King over all gods, demons, and/or human rulers. He is King God over those which include the people who believe in that which is represented by the little Darwin fish with legs; or the sharks eating the fish; or the yellow and blue equal signs; or those with the “Be Kind” flowers on their bumpers, or the people with the rainbows on their cars; or those who claim to reject any god. The Creator God still rules over His creation and creatures – even those who reject Him. This “I Am Who Causes to Be” is the One that you declare in the face of so much unbelief. God’s Word, your Psalm, the Church’s song in the Venite, continues as you call to one another:

O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand.¹⁰

Or, as it may be more literally rendered:

All of you come: let us worship and let us bow down, let us kneel before (the) Face of YHWH our Maker. For He (is) our Elohe, and we (are the) people of His pasture and (the) sheep of His Hand...,¹¹

There is the language of human response to being in the Real Presence of God, chanted by those who are able to remain before His Face and not be consumed by the purity of His holiness. All the faithful are called together in their offering of the

⁹ *Psalm 95:3-5.*

¹⁰ The Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. *Lutheran Service Book*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006, 220f.

¹¹ *Psalm 95:6-7a.*

sacrifices of the faithful. The prime Psalm of Matins is for those who know Who the Creator God is; Who believe themselves to be the recipients of His gracious gifts; Who still gives them, us, you, the right to call Him “our God.”

That makes this Psalm, and the Order of the Lord’s Service to His people in which it primarily falls, one that is truly ecumenical. Psalm 95 reaches across the very real and important divides in Christendom concerning God’s gifts of Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and Confession and Absolution. It reaches out with the truth that real worship consists of God’s people recognizing that, as sheep, we do not provide anything for ourselves for this body and life. The song of the Church declares that we who are truly “Church” rely fully on God to give us our daily bread, and to defend us from all that would rend and tear us from His flock.

With a Trinitarian doxology, that is where the Venite which you know ends. But the Psalm does not end with the words, *sheep of His Hand*... It continues with words that lead to a context which you likely do not think of when you chant Matins. The Psalm continues with God’s Word of convicting, killing, and condemning Law, as it says:

today if you all will hear His Voice, do not all of you harden your hearts as at Meribah; as (in the) day (of) Massah in (the) wilderness when your fathers tested Me, in putting Me to (the) test, though they had seen My work.¹²

Many of us have heard for several years, some for many years, and all of us today whose ears were not stopped up at the Old Testament Reading, of the complaining of God’s people against Moses and Aaron. Further, on account of those two having received the Divine Call, we know that the people’s complaints against them for following God’s Word were really grumbling against God.

What you may have missed is that the truth that grumbling against a man who is actually preaching the right division of God’s Law and Gospel shows that the murmurs are actually at odds with God’s Word. Thus, such complainers are at enmity with God. Such “nay-sayers” are not just limited to the Old Covenant people of God.

¹² Psalm 95:7b–9.

Why, in the past 20 or so years, such griping about God's services, and those who are rightly offering God's gifts to His people, has been heard in our midst.

One misguided unhappy fellow, while not a member of this congregation, stopped attending the Lord's services here about 16 years ago. When asked why, his response was to this effect, "Don't the elders notice when someone stops giving?" The fellow stopped giving because, as he said, "I do not like Matins." (The answer at the time was, "we have no elders." The answer is now, "our elders are not concerned with tracking your giving, that is between you and God.") That grumbler of the last century did not like the sung Word of God offered to God's people and the sheep of His pasture according to the ancient rites of Christ's Church. So that consumer-minded man stopped giving and coming to God's services in this place.

He apparently had found a congregation which met his felt needs. They did not offend his sensibilities by offering the Word of God in time-tested proclamations of the Word. Now that congregation is part of a public confession of some sort of faith which tries not to offend anyone's sensibilities. They are careful to not hold to God's Word with regard to who can be married, who can publicly preach; and who may rightly administer the sacraments. They are truly inoffensive to their consumer audience.

Yet God's Church is not a consumer-oriented business. You are not paying for a service. If you are not giving and stop coming to receive God's gifts and the Word is being preached rightly, you are at odds with God. Get that right, repent and believe that Jesus died for you...

Why, we still have a few errant souls left in good old Missouri who still think we ought to follow consumer-driven, inoffensive paths. Some of them still bear the title, "pastor," a few active, some emeritus. Perhaps God will turn such as they are called to receive the right services of the Word as is exemplified by the 95th Psalm. But, since all are fallen humans, some will maintain their errant confessions of faith, all the while rejecting the true public confession of the Faith. For them the warning of the end of this week's Psalm (which is not in our day's public reading) stands:

Forty years I loathed (that) generation, and I said, "They are (a) people erring in heart, and not they know My ways."

Then I swore in My anger, "They (will) not come into My rest."¹³

To us who are contrite in heart, us who are moved by the preaching of God's Word to turn from our sins, God continues to show His ways. They are mercy and grace, and the promises of the first and major portion of the 95th Psalm. Let it be for you as it has been for the faithful for millennia in the Lord's services. In Christ, you are free to continue to respond to His invitation in the Faith:

All of you come: let us worship and let us bow down, let us kneel before (the) Face of YWHW our Maker. For He (is) our Elohe, and we (are the) people of His pasture and (the) sheep of His Hand...¹⁴

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Septuagesima (*Lutheran Service Book* one-year series)

Psalm 95:1-9; Exodus 17:1-7; I Corinthians 9:24-10:5; Matthew 20:1-16

February 16, 2014

Pastor Michael A. Merhouse

Soli Deo Gloria

¹³ *Psalm 95:10-11.*

¹⁴ *Psalm 95:6-7a.*

All of you come, let us sing to YHWH, let us cause to make joyful noise to (the) Rock (of) our salvation;¹⁵

let us come before His Face in thanksgiving, in singing psalms (or songs) let us cause to make (a) joyful noise to Him.¹⁶

For El (is the) great YHWH and (the) great King above all elohim."¹⁷

(In) Whose Hand (are the) depths of earth and (the) heights of mountains (are also) His¹⁸

Who (has) the sea, for He made it, and His hands formed (the) dry land.¹⁹

All of you come: let us worship and let us bow down, let us kneel before (the) Face of YHWH our Maker.²⁰

For He (is) our Elohe, and we (are the) people of His pasture and (the) sheep of His Hand; today if you all will hear His Voice,²¹

do not all of you harden your hearts as at Meribah; as (in) day (of) Massah in (the) wilderness,²²

when your fathers tested Me, in putting Me to (the) test, though they had seen My work.²³

Forty years I loathed (that) generation, and I said, "They are (a) people erring in heart, and not they know My ways."²⁴

Then I swore in My anger, "They (will) not come into My rest."²⁵

¹⁵ Psalm 95:1.

¹⁶ Psalm 95:2.

¹⁷ Psalm 95:3.

¹⁸ Psalm 95:4.

¹⁹ Psalm 95:5.

²⁰ Psalm 95:6.

²¹ Psalm 95:7.

²² Psalm 95:8.

²³ Psalm 95:9.

²⁴ Psalm 95:10.

²⁵ Psalm 95:11.