

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior,
Jesus Christ.

I have to admit this week I wasn't myself. I started getting sick on Sunday last week and got worse every day. I finally gave up and went to the Wright Patterson Base hospital on Friday. We normally go to what I always call the main gate. It's the one on Broad Street in Fairborn, but since it was after hours that gate was closed. So, we had to turn around and drive across town to the gate off of Route 444 by the AFMC Headquarters building. I guess that's the real "Main Gate". I always like going through the Gates at the Base. Even though I'm retired the guards still salute me when they see my retired rank. On Friday, PJ was driving and when she held up our ID Cards for the Security Forces sergeant to verify who we were, she must have covered up the front of my ID with hers. The Gate Guard asked her to move my ID so he could see my rank, then he snapped me a sharp salute and wished us a good evening. It brought me back to my Active Duty days and made me feel important once again as he professionally welcomed us onto the Base.

Back in ancient times it wasn't just military bases that had fences, walls, and gates. Every town and city was protected by them. When an important person such as the king arrived, the people would rush out to the gate to meet him. The city gates became the place where merchants set up their stores and most business

in ancient times happened near the gates of the city. For travelers, the sight of their city's gate must have filled them with great joy. It signified homecoming and the place of safety. The people were happy when they passed through the gate because they knew they were home.

Jerusalem had gates too. There were several gates in the walls that surrounded the city, but there were also gates in the walls that marked off the different areas of the Temple Mount. There was a Wall that separated the entire Temple from the rest of the city. Then, inside of that wall a gate led to an inner courtyard where all people, Jews and Gentiles, men and women could mingle. This is where the sacrificial animals were bought and sold. Inside that area there was another wall with a gate that led into the inner courtyard. In this area no women or Gentiles were allowed. Only Jewish men. Inside that was another wall, gate and courtyard where the altar was set up and the priests were the only ones allowed in there. The final wall and gate enclosed the Holy of Holies. Only the High Priest could go inside that area, and it was also separated by a large curtain. They believed the literal presence of God resided behind that curtain in the Holy of Holies.

So, in ancient Hebrew worship, you had to enter several gates in order to be closer to the presence of God and only the High Priest was allowed in the actual presence of the Lord. It was thought that if you looked upon the presence of God

you would die. So, the High Priest was tethered to a rope in case He accidentally raised his eyes and stole a glance at the Almighty. It must have been a very awesome and fearful thing to go behind that curtain. So, as the worship liturgy developed around the Temple in Jerusalem, it's no wonder they would begin by singing a Psalm like Psalm 100. This Psalm set the tone for the worship service to follow. It's not a bad song or poem to start any encounter with God.

Because of Psalm 100 our regular, pre-Covid Lutheran Worship service always has what we call the Gathering Song. When the Worship folks pick a song for gathering, we look for a song that is uplifting, but also gives God our thanks and praise. On Communion Sundays we add another song we call the Song of Praise. It's not a coincidence or happenstance that we do things in this way. When we do, we're following a very ancient way to worship God that dates back to the First Temple built by King Solomon some 950 years before Jesus was born. We're following in a long line of saints who have followed the same pattern of worship for a very long time. That's why I want us to get back to our regular pattern of worship as soon as we possibly can.

In Psalm 100 we're told to make a joyful noise to the Lord upon entering the Gates of His presence. The trouble with this instruction is that we have to balance it with the needs of other people who come into the presence of the Lord and need to meditate or find their center before worship begins. They would like to keep the

time before worship as sacred and silent so they can hear God's still small voice.

It's a hard balance to strike. I look at it like this. We have a plaque in our Kitchen that reads, "Our House is clean enough to be healthy and dirty enough to be happy!" The time before worship, as we're entering into the presence of God, should be quite enough to be holy and rowdy enough to be joyful. If our chatter at the beginning of worship is catching up with our friends and finding out about their recent surgery or how their son's job search is going so that you are better able to pray for and assist them, then the noise your making is joyful to the Lord. On the other hand, if the conversation is about so and so who just left her husband or the terrible way that one treats his spouse or any of the other latest and juiciest gossip that happens along, then maybe were just making too much noise and the joy isn't in it... My suggestion is to just try your best to keep the focus of your mind and heart on God and let these ancient ways and ancient words wash over you and refresh your soul and your entire being. I don't know about anyone else, but for me, the more I try to focus on God and praising God just for being our God and not for any of the blessings God bestows, the less and less the outside noise bothers me. It's like I've switched from being an omnidirectional microphone that picks up all the surrounding sounds to a directional mic, like the new one we're testing out today. This thing is supposed to filter out most of the side sounds and concentrates on the sounds coming from the direction it's pointed toward. We're

hoping it improves the quality of the audio for our Facebook live viewers. If you're watching today, please let our digital greeter know how this new mic sounds...

When we come into the presence of the Lord we should try to be like our new directional microphone turning all our attention to God and filtering out all the side noise. If we can do that, it won't matter if people are talking in the back or even if they're laughing and making raucous jovial noises, you won't notice it because you're focused on something much bigger, something much more awe inspiring, the very presence of God.

Thankfully, we don't have walls around our parking lot. In fact, we try to make this place as welcoming as we can. Even though there's no gate guard posted to render a salute when you come through our doors, we do try to have greeters every week, so you are welcomed and know we're happy you are with us. Our digital greeter works a little differently than our in-person greeter. If you are worshipping online we only know you're there if you make a comment, so please say hello when you log in. Also, if you have any prayer concerns, please let the digital greeter know and we'll try to include them in the prayers of the church each week.

We also know that the souls in heaven rejoice when you join in worshipping God. It's a happy occasion, let's act like it! May we never lose our joy in coming into the presence of God. May we always balance our joyfulness with our respect for the Holiness of God's presence. May God's love always remain steadfast and enduring, always giving us joy and hope for a better tomorrow. Amen.