

**A Living Doxology
A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church
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Sardis Baptist Church
Second Sunday after Pentecost
Psalm 100
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I have a lot of favorite things about Sardis Baptist Church. Actually strike that. I have ONE favorite thing about Sardis Baptist Church, and about a million second-favorite things about Sardis Baptist Church.

In the spirit of honesty, I'll reveal to you that my favorite thing is not prophetic, nor thought-provoking, and it's not even original. It's just not. It's green beans. That's right, green beans. Because anytime we have a community meal, there's always green beans: some with French's fried onions, some cooked in lard, some made healthy, some with almonds – But all of them delicious. All of them made with care. And all of them reflecting the generosity and goodness of the ones who shared them. And all of them on my plate!!!

So there you have it. Your preacher is as deep as plate of green beans.

But I did say I had about a million close-seconds. And one of those close-seconds is this community's commitment to a particular attitude of worship. For nearly thirty years, the DNA of Sardis worship has not been characterized by a particular style or tradition, but rather by the idea that worship is first and foremost an authentic gift for God. The worship of God is not something to be captured in a net like a butterfly, or made into a performance, or tamed and tamped down, or even to be archived and documented like a timesheet. The worship of God is a gift – it is given in a moment, it's fleeting, even, and it is set free, allowed to float through space and time. And we offer our worship with all that we are, even our emotions. This means that each week, we join our Creator with all of our sensibilities AND shortcomings; with all of our joys AND sorrows; with all of our confidence AND vulnerability. And the hope of this place is that we can always do that in safety – because here in this space we meet a God who meets us where we are, and proclaims: You are loved. "Always. Always. Always."

It's fitting then, that on this Pentecost Cantata Sunday, today's lection is the Granddaddy of Praise Psalms: Psalm 100. I think every word of this Psalm is fantastic. And I could spend all day breaking down every verse. But I promised you a homily, not a dissertation. So let me focus on one phrase that jumps out: "Make yourselves at home, talking praise."

The psalmist tells us that God is good. And that this goodness, God's goodness, is our source. God's goodness created us. And that good source, that thing we call God, invites us into its presence. In other words, God is just like those good folks who take the time to cook good green beans. Because let me tell you, if you take time to make green beans the right way, then you are also the kind of person who tells any visitor to your house, "Come on in! Make yourself at home!" And before you know it, that neighbor's on a Lazy-Boy, drink in hand, belly full, and no longer feeling like a visitor. And I think that's what the Psalmist is trying to tell us today: God wants you to be at home in God's house.

And so when you come into God's house just as you are; And when you make yourself comfortable enough to laugh, or to cry, or to sing, or even to sing off key and out of tune and still be heard; Or to

make known the very things that are on your heart; You worship the LORD. And you worship the LORD like you are giving a gift, or like someone who knows how to cook good green beans!!!

So Sardis Baptist Church, I want to do two things. First, I want to thank you. Over the last two years, you have written every invocation and offertory prayer – these have been YOUR WORDS. You have shared readings that have informed YOUR faith. You have made known by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving your thoughts to the LORD. You have sung like you wanted to be heard. You have made yourselves at home talking praise. Thank you. That matters.

And that brings me to my second point. Some might say that we let our worship distract us from our purpose: don't we have a church to run, and missions to complete, and a world to fix?

We do indeed.

BUT... I would argue that we will NOT become the people God has called us to be until we find a way to first be comfortable in the presence of God – that is – we cannot be God's people if we're too scared to sit in God's Lazy Boy.

For when we experience God's hospitality, we begin to realize our collective gifts, and our collective possibilities. And God is no longer the obstacle to those goals, but rather God is the catalyst. I believe, with all my heart, that worship is the beginning of transformation. It is not idleness. It is not meaningless. It is our purpose and our source and our start.

And when we worship our Maker, we experience the kind of transformation that makes this world a better place. We know God. And we know one another. And we know love. And empathy. And even pain. And the Spirit compels us to act.

Sardis Baptist Church, when we worship: we breathe, we exist, we develop, we grow, we become God's people.

So loosen up. Get comfortable. Put on your elastic waistband to make room for those green beans. We have a God to praise. And a doxology that needs to be more than sung – we have a doxology that needs to be lived.

Amen.