**Homily for JUNE 18, 2023 Psalm 100 “Jubilation Station”**

Be joyful in the Lord, all you lands; serve the Lord with gladness and come before his presence with a song. Know this: The Lord himself is God; he himself has made us, and we are his; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise; give thanks to him and call upon his Name. For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his faithfulness endures from age to age.

It was nearly fifty years ago, surrounded by fathers and uncles and grandfathers, that I learned a valuable life lesson.  A group of men and teens from my church were building new cabins at my favorite church camp, Skye Farm.  We young bucks were all swagger and speed, competing as to who could drive the nails with the fewest number of strikes.  We were not overly concerned with precision, just power and pizazz.  The older men, as you can imagine, were more measured in their approach, careful, methodical.  And they were, of course, the ones still swinging the hammers at sundown when all the teens had already collapsed.  The lesson was about the importance of a good foundation.

You see, we were there for just under a week, and teams from other churches would follow us.  It would be *their* delight to build and raise walls and roofs and do all the fun stuff...*we* had the job of preparing the ground and building five platforms, set on sturdy, level, square foundations.  But, we whined, we came to build, not dig, not scrape and measure time after boring, endless time.  When do *we* get to pound nails?  And the lessons, quiet but confident, began, about the pure beauty of a solid, square, level base upon which to build, and about how everything suffered and got worse the higher it went if the base was off, even just a little bit.  Height and weight compounded the structural problems, but a proper foundation could hold and support quite a bit more.  And later, after supper with guitar in hand and sitting around a gently roaring campfire, those preachments took a much more personal turn.  Those fathers, some with looks of great regret, could not stress enough the importance of a solid *spiritual* foundation, and shared stories of their lives, when what they were building had collapsed for want of a good under-structure.

I remember today's Psalm from that same church camp; we had a rousing sung version that really helped the hours go by.  We took that joyful noise part seriously, and came before God, not just with hammers and saws, but with a song.  The foundation part started, for us, in the second verse, where we were reminded that the Lord was God, capital G, not just one of many competing deities that flood the minds and hearts of young people who are still trying to build their castles in the air.  We are talking about **God** here, the creator of the universe, the one who had the patience and skill to set the foundations, not just for some cabins in the woods, but for all of life.  And this God made us, too, fashioned us, too, with that same care and precision.  We were Gods property, God's handwork, that was the message.  And we, with blistered palms and aching backs, began a first-time appreciation of things created by hand, things brought up from nothing with thought and care and effort and physical labor, not just slapped together, but quality!  We, braggadocious outside but cringing little boys inside, were growing up, hearing the truth about ourselves for the first time, that we were fearfully and wonderfully constructed, and that God took care to *get us right*, so that what we built after that would hold together and weather the storms of life.

The other important part of this Psalm was the fourth verse, the part about God’s love.  What little boy, no matter how arrogant, doesn't want his father’s love, his approval, that clap on the back that is worth a hundred hugs from Mom?  We learned that God was *way* more patient than our real dads, or our camp dad substitutes; God’s love was both steadfast and eternal.  We knew what eternal felt like, sweating over the boards and blocks that humid week in late June, swatting the millionth mosquito away and wondering just how many there could possibly be.  Those work afternoons felt like forever.  But steadfast, that was a mystery concept, until an inspired dad drove a big lag screw through two pieces of scrap wood and challenged his cocky young co-workers to take those boards apart.  No problem, we thought...but nowhere near as easy as it looked, and while we were sweating and straining and cursing in a politely acceptable Methodist way, the leader was explaining that God’s love is *steadfast*, binding us, drawing us together like that auger held those boards so tightly.  I have used that image my entire ministry and it works every time, because we all need to know that God is not like people, fickle and betraying and sloppy.  God’s love, God’s care, God’s hopes and intentions for our lives, all these are steadfast.

The final lesson of the Psalm came to life before our very eyes in the devoted lives of those older guys, men who had been boys like us once, men who had benefitted from being started out right, with their foundations square and strong.  We could see that the lives they had built were solid and dependable and full of meaning.  And we could see that the joy of the Lord, the excitement of making something good out of their lives, was a gift to all generations, not just us young whippersnappers. We saw that they could arise each morning with jubilant hearts despite their work-stiffened muscles. What we were really learning about was God’s *faithfulness,* God keeping faith with people their whole lives long.  We could see it, old, wizened guys with a light in their eyes and a spring in their step.  All generations, huh? We got it.

Those platforms turned out pretty great.  I went back the following year and stayed in one of the now finished cabins, and walked corner to corner, jumped around, tried to get that floor to rock or tilt...but it did not even wiggle.  I directed camp there in my early thirties, and secretly went into those same cabins before the kids arrived, and did my quality testing again.  Solid, no squeaks, everything as sound as a pound, as the Brits say. Solid as the day we built it.  And the *last* time I was there, thirty years after their construction, those cabin floors were still doing their fine supportive job and sheltering little kids in safety from storm and wind and hungry porcupines.  And so, on this Father’s Day, I want to thank all those camp dads who were not my real dad, but still cared and raised me for a week.   I needed to share their story and truth with you.  Theirs was a well-founded joy, a deep-seated contentment of building strong and true, both externally and in their own lives.  I am as old now as they were then, and their lessons have never left me.  I hope they would be proud of what they built in *me*, and be surprised that the sarcastic little whelp I used to be has evened out, squared up, and is now helping others build, and make a joyful noise to God in the process.  Amen.