



making God's love visible in downtown Memphis

Consider the Daisies, No Matter What
The Last Sunday after Pentecost, Year A, Psalm 100
November 26, 2023
The Rev. Paul McLain

In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Brinson Foster was a grocer in my hometown of Monticello, Mississippi. My father, brother, and I had approached him for years about the idea of building a larger grocery store on a piece of property that we owned. But we could never quite pull the deal together. One day Brinson called me out of the blue. He said, "Paul, I want to talk to you about that piece of property your family owns." My heart started racing as I thought, "Yes! He's finally ready to make our dream deal!" I said, "Of course, Brinson. What do you have in mind?" He said, "Well, I was driving by the property this morning, and spotted a beautiful patch of daisies growing there. I wondered if it would be okay if I picked some of them to put together a centerpiece for dinner with my family tonight."

After I picked myself off the floor, I regrouped and said, "Why, of course, Brinson. Pick all you want. Enjoy your dinner." Around this time, Brinson had been diagnosed with ALS, commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease. After I got over my disappointment about the deal and spent some time reflecting on our conversation, I wondered if Brinson's brush with mortality had made him more aware of the things that really mattered. What I saw as a site for a potential real estate deal, he saw as the splendor of God's creation, beauty that he longed to share with his family that evening.

Our Psalm this morning, Psalm 100, invites us to slow down, give thanks, and praise God's creation. This Psalm is called the Jubilate Deo, Latin for its opening words, 'Be joyful in the Lord.' We often say it at the beginning of our online Morning Prayer, and it is a marker for the sanctification of time and for exiting and entering sacred spaces. It is very appropriate for this Sunday, as we mark the end of the church year and as we celebrate our final worship services here in the Great Hall.

Some wondered if we might see our time in exile from our beautiful, historic worship space as a time of hardship with feelings of deprivation. Instead, over the course of worshiping here the last six months, many of you have commented on the intimacy of this space – how you have gotten to know each other better, how you have forged new

and deeper relationships with persons you used to glimpse across the other side of the church. Our time in this sacred space has also drawn us into a more profound intimacy with God. May we carry that spirit into the renovated Nave next week.

Psalm 100 invites us into that spirit of intimacy. It reminds us that we are made by God, we belong to God, and we are the sheep of God's pasture. We are entrusted to the intimate, loving care of our shepherd – a shepherd willing to leave the 99 to come find and care for any one of us who is lost. Ultimately, the Psalm remind us that God is good.

Scott Bader-Saye writes: 'With God, there is no question that the shepherd has the best interests of the sheep at heart, even when the circumstances of our lives seem to indicate otherwise. Even when the worst happens, that does not change the goodness of God.'

Brinson understood that. Even as his body deteriorated, his spirit soared. You could still see him at the grocery store every day. He loved serving his customers and graciously accepted their hugs. He joked with and cheered on his co-workers. As his voice became weaker, his smile became brighter. There was no place that he would rather be.

In many ways, Brinson's life became Psalm 100. Each day, he served the Lord with gladness and came before God's presence with a song. The doors of the grocery store were God's gates to him. He entered them each day with a heart of thanksgiving. Brinson lived a life of gratitude.

Henri Nouwen writes: 'To be grateful for the good things in our lives is easy, but to be grateful for all of our lives – the good as well as the bad, the moments of joy as well as the moments of sorrow, the successes as well as the failures, the rewards as well as the rejections – that requires hard spiritual work. Still, we are only truly grateful people when we can say thank you to all that has brought us to the present moment. As long as we keep dividing our lives between events and people we would like to remember and those we would rather forget, we cannot claim the fullness of our beings as a gift of God for which to be grateful.'

The Psalm ends, 'God's mercy is everlasting, and God's faithfulness endures from age to age.' When Brinson spotted those daisies, he saw the everlasting, enduring nature of God, and his phone call invited me to begin to look for it too.

Brinson died a year or so after he called me that day. Eventually, the much-needed larger grocery store was built on that piece of property. Brinson didn't live to see it, but he laid the groundwork for it.

Around the time that store was being built, a group of volunteers also created Cooper's Ferry Park along the Pearl River a block away from the new store. They landscaped it beautifully and made sure to keep the natural wildflowers intact, including a patch of daisies. Appropriately, the park is located on Brinson Street.

When I go back to Monticello, I often stop by the park to listen to the insect sounds around the river and to see all the colors of the surrounding vegetation. After a little while there, I can hear Brinson's voice whispering to me, 'Take time to consider the daisies, no matter what.'
Amen.