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Welcome Into This Place

by Rev. Douglas S. Stivison, Pastor

When planning worship, as pastor, I select the week's hymns to support the week's specific Scripture lessons and my intended sermon topic. Our wonderful musical director, Olga, selects the other music — prelude, postlude, introit, and anthems — generally to reflect the seasonal themes such as Advent, Lent, and Easter and to showcase the talents of the choir, soloists, and instrumentalists. It is a wonderful balance and our church is blessed with a consistent level of beautiful and inspiring music that really does create the overall context in which we can encounter God in our worship service and, most importantly of all, in our hearts.

This month — for the first time ever — I asked the choir to sing one of my personal favorite introits. Each week, the choir has given us the gift of these words:

Welcome into this place. Welcome into this broken vessel.

You desire to abide in the praises of your people.

So we raise our hands, and we raise our hearts to offer up this praise unto your name.

What is an introit, actually? An introit, like the related word “introduction,” is all about *beginning a relationship*. It is about separate parties *encountering each other*. *It is about being in the same place with somebody else at the same time*. And one reason we have an introit as part of our Sunday order of worship is to help create the setting in which we can find God. It is about beginning our worship encounter with God. All musical introits are intended to help us make the transition from our everyday thoughts into our worshipful thoughts.

For the past few weeks we have been using this particular introit because it is so closely linked to the themes we have been exploring in the Scripture and sermons — the awe-inspiring fact that God does not demand perfection in order to love us. In fact, God is always willing to be there for us *despite* the brokenness in our lives and relationships. We've seen how God responded to the broken faith of Doubting Thomas and entered into and overcame his brokenness. We saw how God responded to the hatred in Saul's heart and healed his brokenness as well. We've looked at how God offers us the gift of the true peace of the Sabbath to overcome the brokenness in all of our lives.

I celebrate the fact that I am able to worship a God of such steadfast love, such compassion, such understanding. I'm glad we have the richness of Scripture to help us explore these characteristics of God. But I'm also glad that people have been able to distill this wonderful feeling into a few lines of an introit that I find myself whistling and singing to myself all week long. It has become almost like a daily prayer. I hope that you, too, may be finding it a wonderful way to remind yourself of God's welcome into us “broken vessels” and the reminder that God abides — lives and can be encountered — in our praises — yours and mine.