

*“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises.” – Psalm 98:4*

Sing a new song to the Lord, sing a joyous song to the ends of the earth, break forth into joyous song, the hills will sing together, the floods clap their hands at the presence of the Lord! These are a collection of verses from the Psalm 98, in another time we likely would have sung this Psalm. For those of you that love to sing this is the psalm for you – it is a psalm that is chock full with singing from the first line to the last – it speaks of the power and place of song in our lives and in the life of the church. Personally singing, and music are a large part of my own life – nary a day goes by that I am not whistling or singing some song or tune while going about my business. In fact, one of my proudest days as a father, was the day I realized that I had passed on to my daughter, my annoying habit of inventing songs about mundane daily activities. I know a number of you here have caught me whistling down the halls during the week or on a Sunday morning!

Even those of you here that do not love singing quite as much cannot deny the power and importance of song in our lives and in our worship as a church – there is something about singing, about joining our voices together in a common refrain which is powerful. And yet singing in groups isn't something that happens very frequently in our culture today – the church is one of the few places in society where people sing together. Despite all the music that fills our airwaves, despite musicians being the height of today's celebrity culture, the formative, congenial and mirthful act of singing together is a lost art in a culture of personalized music players and extreme individualism.

Any quick search of the internet about the benefit of singing will turn up scores of articles suggesting the various benefits of singing for your health and wellbeing. Singing can prolong your life, can boost your memory, make you more creative, can help you distress, can make you a nicer person and can even make you happier! So on the surface it would seem that there are an endless number of reasons for us to sing, for singing to be a part of our life as disciples of Christ and for singing to be an integral part of our common life together as the Body of Christ.

But this merely scratches the surface of the place of song in the Church and in our lives. Song, singing and music permeates through the Bible from the beginning in Genesis 4 where Jubal is referenced as the ancestor of those who played the lyre and pipe, through to Moses, Miriam and David who sang and danced to praise the Lord, and finally in the Book of Revelation we see the heavenly choirs singing praises to the Lamb. There is something mystical, something ethereal, something sacred about communal song – singing in the scriptures is beyond the mundane, there is something primordial, something at the very heart of creation, something at the very heart of God about music and song.

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Our Psalm today is a perfect example of this. In our Psalm today, the psalmist exhorts all the earth to make a joyful noise to the Lord; the seas roar with praises to God; the floods clap their hands; the hills sing to their maker. Song is at the heart of creation, music is interwoven into the fabric of our world – at the very heart of every created thing, every rock, every tree, every bird and each and everyone of us here is song. All of creation is ordered to sing to the Creator, all of creation is intended to sing praises to God. This isn't just something inside of creation it is rooted in the very nature of God himself. In the book of Zephaniah, in the prophet's final prophecy of God's

vindication of Israel he writes “The Lord your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.” God will sing over his chosen people, the heavens and the earth will resound with the very song of God. We sing, because God first sang; we sing, rejoice, shout with praise because in song we reflect the very heart of God

And yet so often our songs are not the songs of joy and praise, they are songs of lament, anguish, pain and discord. The songs of creation seem to be drowned out by the sounds of violence, sounds of oppression, the sounds of hatred and despair that flood our world. This is the power of Sin; the power that drowns out the harmonious melodies of the heavenly songs; this is the power which pulls us away from the sweet and life-giving music of God. Sin is the reason we cannot sing the way that God intends us to, sin is the reason that creation groans for the fulfillment of all things, sin is the barrier which turns our songs from joy and praise to ones of lament, anguish and discord.

Sin does not however, have the final word, our songs, and the songs of all of creation are not muted forever, our songs need not rest in lament, anguish and discord for eternity, God has given us a way to sing out in joy and praise once again, God has ensured that the hymns of praise Creation sings will resound above the cacophony of violence, hatred and despair. God sent his Son, Jesus, to remove the power of Sin, to remove the discordant cacophony which stops us from hearing the sweet melodies of God. The Good News is that in Jesus, in his death and resurrection, God has removed the ultimate power of Sin from the world, he has removed the sting of death which ends our songs abruptly – the Good News is that in Jesus we are welcomed once more into the song of God, we are welcomed once more into the primordial hymn of the Triune God. Notice that God’s song is never sung in isolation, it is never an individual song – God’s song is communal, it is always inviting and drawing people in. Throughout the Bible, God’s song is sung in community, it is sung as the people gathered in praise and adoration of their Lord and Saviour.

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This is why we sing together on Sunday mornings, this is why it is so important that we sing the words of Scripture together, this is why it is so important that we sing the Psalms, this is why it is important that we sing hymns and songs of praise together. The act of singing together, even for those here who might be uncomfortable with singing, draws us into the chorus of God, draws us into the very life of God even if just for a moment – it provides us a taste of the relationship that the Church will experience with God forever. And so while today we may sing in lament, or anguish, or despair that is not our end, that is not what we are destined for – our ultimate end, the ultimate end of the Church is to be united to Christ as a bride to her bridegroom, to be united in the heavenly chorus singing ‘Holy, Holy, Holy’ around the Lamb. Let us embrace our destiny as divine singers rejoicing and praising the Lord God Almighty. Thanks be to God! Let us pray.