

A new song

Psalm 98

May 13, 2012

(Sermon begins with video: Psalm 98
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rf6jenX94BE>)

*Sing for joy to the Lord, all the earth!
Roar, sea, and every creature in you!
Sing, earth, and all who live on you!
Clap your hands, you rivers!
You hills, sing together with joy before the Lord!
Sing for joy to the Lord, all the earth!*

Don't you see? This is more than metaphor, so much more than metaphor! The sea is roaring! The rivers are clapping! The earth and all the creatures who fill it are singing! The hills are singing with joy!

You saw the images. Did you hear the music? I'm telling you, even without the soundtrack, you could have heard music!

Because all the earth is singing for joy to the Lord! It can't help it, because, as I heard another minister put it, "All of creation is drenched in God." All of creation is drenched in God: springing forth from God's imagination, shining out with God's beauty, pulsating with the energy of God's spirit, reflecting and embodying God's glory.

The earth is full of the glory of God! The earth is not just a stage, not just a backdrop to the real drama being played out in some invisible spiritual realm. The earth is part of the drama, part of the real story, part of our story, or, rather, the earth and we are parts together of God's story.

Like the earth, we are made by God. Like the earth, we are made of matter. Together, we and the earth are made to bring glory and delight to God! So matter matters. The earth matters. Our bodies matter. God made us and the earth as we are, to bring him honor and glory in our bodies, here, now.

This is what he made. This is what he loves. This is what he cares about. This is what he wants us to care about. See it. Enjoy it. Appreciate it. Care for it. Be it. Be in it. Be here. Be now. Bring glory to God in your bodies.

How do we do that? By what we make and by what we do. By how we love and by how we serve. By whom we defend and by to whom we defer. By what we paint and by what we sing.

All the earth is singing for joy to the Lord! So what we should do? Sing along! All of us! Not just some of us.

Last week, when Julie and Andrew and Cody joined this church family, they promised to “accept as [their] own the mission of God's people to the world.” Mission is not something just some of us do, not one area of possible interest, one avenue for possible service, within the broader purposes of the church. The church is about mission. The church is mission.

The same is true of music. It's not optional! We're all supposed to be singing! Not all of us are supposed to be singing in the choir. Not all of us should sing in the choir. But we should all be singing!

We should all be singing the same song the earth is singing, a song of joy! Because the Lord has done wonderful things. Because the Lord keeps promises and shows constant love. Because the Lord is coming. Because the Lord is coming to rule with justice and fairness.

Now that's something to sing about!

I'm going to say something that may cause some of you some embarrassment or make you feel self-conscious or hurt your feelings, but I'm going to say it anyway. It makes me sad, it breaks my heart, when I look out into the congregation during a hymn and see some of you not singing. Now I know everybody, anybody, has a right not to sing and that there are surely lots of different reasons for choosing not to sing, but ...

This is when we join our voices together! This is when we join our voices together to sing out our joy! This is when we join ourselves to the earth in our song of joy to the Lord! So when you are not singing, you are not joining, and we are not fully together!

And music is a sign of life. Wherever there is vibrant life, wherever there is vital spirituality, wherever there is spiritual vitality, there is music.

What is spiritual vitality? Spiritual vitality is a sense of the presence of God, an awareness of the presence of God, everywhere, in and among all things.

Spiritual vitality is a realization that our calling to follow Jesus, to live as God's children, encompasses and imbues every part of our lives, not just one piece of it.

Spiritual vitality is a love for God that overrides every other love, but, at the same time, enlarges and enriches every other love.

Spiritual vitality is a love for God that fills us with confidence, a love for God that fills us with peace, a love for God that doesn't turn us inward, but turns us outward, a love for God that turns us toward each other, a love for God that opens our eyes, a love for God that opens our hearts, a love for God that makes us want to sing!

Wherever there is spiritual vitality, there is music. Wherever there is vibrant life, there is singing.

The Hebrews sang psalms. The first Christians sang hymns. Medieval monks chanted. Francis of Assisi wrote songs and canticles. Martin Luther composed hymns. Bach composed his chorales and Brahms his requiem.

Randall Thompson, who wrote the music that accompanied my slideshow, John Helgen, who composed for us the choral anthem in celebration of our 150th anniversary, and so many, many more like them, have given us songs that allow us to express our joy to the Lord in ways we could not otherwise do.

The Taizé community in France, a center for the renewal of life and worship and spiritual vitality, has provided the church with wonderfully meditative and enriching and community-building music.

And singing, singing by and for everybody, is a big part of the life of the Iona Community, of whom twelve of us will be guests in less than a week.

All the earth is singing for joy to the Lord! And we should sing along! But what should we sing? A new song! We should sing a new song!

Why a new song? Because God is always up to something new. Because God is always making things new. Because the Lord is coming. The Lord is coming to us. The Lord is coming here. The Lord is coming now.

Somebody else's song just won't do! A song for a different time and a different place just won't do! It has to be a new song. It has to be our song.

Does that mean we need to abandon our hymn books?

Do you remember when Jesus told his followers he had a new commandment to give to them? Do you remember what it was? Jesus' new commandment was this: "Love one another." That's new?

Jesus' new commandment is the commandment that has been there from the beginning, the commandment that has epitomized the way of God and the way of God's people from the beginning. It becomes new when Jesus embodies it. It becomes new when we embody it, where we are, when we are.

When we sing a song and make it our own, it becomes new. When we sing for joy, for the palpable joy that fills our hearts and minds, because of the wonderful things the Lord has done, because of the wonderful things the Lord is doing, the song we sing is a new song ...

*Sing a new song to the Lord;
he has done wonderful things!
Sing for joy to the Lord, all the earth;
praise him with songs and shouts of joy!
Sing praises to the Lord!
Play music on the harps!
Blow trumpets and horns,
and shout for joy to the Lord, our king.
Roar, sea, and every creature in you;
sing, earth, and all who live on you!
Clap your hands, you rivers;
you hills, sing together with joy before the Lord,
because he comes to rule the earth.
The Lord will rule the peoples of the world
with justice and fairness.
Sing for joy to the Lord, all the earth!*