

Rev. Lisa Schrott
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Psalm 98:1-3
Together for Joy: New Songs

Psalm 98:1-3

O sing to the Lord a new song, for God has done marvelous things.

God's right hand and holy arm have gotten him victory.

The Lord has made known his victory;

God has revealed vindication in the sight of the nations.

God has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

"It all ends" flashes on the screen with creepy music playing in the background and Jaime Lee Curtis looking somewhat maniacal brandishing a weapon. I have seen this commercial now a number of times – especially during football games. Not sure if there is a correlation there... Yes, the movie *Halloween Ends* came to theaters last week, 44 years after the original movie *Halloween* hit the big screen. I was a little too young to watch it when it was first released, but I saw it not too many years later on a VHS tape at a party. I thought the horror of *Halloween* had ended awhile back, but apparently we are in a season of reboots, remakes, sequels and prequels. We are in season of nostalgia.

Earlier this year, just before the Super Bowl halftime show brought us the greatest hits of the 90's, New York Times columnist Melissa Kirsch penned a column titled "The Comforts of Nostalgia." She wrote, "When the present moment is stressful or uncomfortable, when the future seems especially fuzzy or uncertain, nostalgia offers a balm. It's why many of us turned to "Friends" reunions, "Sopranos" re-binges and childhood video games earlier in the pandemic. As Gen Xers and many millennials approach or move through middle age, the entertainment industry has become determined to soothe their passage with a ceaseless and sentimental remembrance of things past." ¹

When I first read this, I thought she might be a little harsh – or maybe I am just an overly sensitive Gen-Xer that doesn't think I need my passage through middle age soothed with sentimental remembrances. But then again, Brian and I did rewatch *The West Wing* during the early days of the pandemic.

One particular comment that Ms. Kirsch wrote struck a chord with me. She said, "Nostalgia is easily packaged and sold because it promises to create a community out of a cohort. We experience this every day on social media: Strangers become momentary pals when you

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/26/briefing/nostalgia-oscars-mardi-gras.html>

swap stories of the music you loved or the clothes you wore when you were both in sixth grade.”

Nostalgia promises to create a community out of a cohort. A shared experience – even something that on the surface may seem trivial – bonds people together. And in our world today we are hungry – maybe even desperate - for that. We are longing for that sense of belongingness, that we are not in this alone, that someone, anyone sees us for who we are. We want to be part of something bigger than ourselves – we want to be together.

This was the place the author of Psalm 98 found themselves. Psalm 98 is in a section of the Psalms which reflect on the sovereignty of God – God’s rule over all things in the world and beyond. They are sometimes referred to as “enthronement” psalms, as they declare God as a ruler or king, master creator, victorious over the forces that cause suffering, and victorious over those who had seemed to defeat God’s people Israel.²

Many enthronement psalms were written in the period after the Hebrew people returned from exile in Babylon. This exile was a defining event in life of Israel. After the exodus from slavery and wandering through the desert, after receiving the covenant of the law, after the conquest of the promised land of Canaan, after the rise of David to unite the Hebrew tribes into the nation of Israel, the people failed in living out the first commandment – to have no other God before the Lord God. Scripture tells us as a consequence, the Northern Kingdom of Israel was defeated by the Assyrians and the southern Kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians. The great temple of Solomon was destroyed and the people were thrown into exile. And after 70 years they returned to their home, destroyed by the conquest, to rebuild. To find a new song.

The Psalms mirror this rise and fall and rebirth of the Hebrew people. Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann groups the psalms into those of orientation, disorientation, and new or re-orientation. Psalms of orientation are psalms of gratitude, that “articulate the joy, delight, goodness, coherence, and reliability of God, God’s creation, God’s governing law.” Psalms of disorientation are in response to “hurt, alienation, suffering, and death.” These psalms “evoke rage, resentment, self-pity.” They are psalms of lament....” How long O, Lord.

Psalm 98 is one of the psalms of new orientation.³ Brueggemann says, “Human life consists in turns of surprise when we are overwhelmed with the new gifts of God. When joy breaks through the despair...[these psalms] speak boldly about a new gift from God, a fresh intrusion that makes things new.”⁴

² <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/christmas-day-nativity-of-our-lord-iii/commentary-on-psalm-98>

³ Walter Brueggemann. *The Message of the Psalms*. Augsburg Old Testament Series. Augsburg Publishing House. 1984, p147-148.

⁴ *Ibid* p19.

This cycle of orientation – disorientation – new orientation can be seen in the seasons of an individual’s life, as well as the seasons of communal life. For the Hebrew people, the return from exile was a season of reorientation as they rebuilt from the destruction – their homes, their lands, their Temple gone. They had a choice – they could be nostalgic for what once was or they could sing a new song and rebuild. They chose to rebuild – and rebuild not just structures but community. In the book of Nehemiah we hear that after the Israelites had rebuilt the wall around Jerusalem, they gathered as a community to hear Ezra read the Word of God: “Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, “Amen! Amen!” Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground....Then Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”⁵

The joy of the Lord is your strength. The psalmist says, “O sing to the Lord a new song. God has remembered God’s steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.” Amen and amen. And while there were definite bumps in the road during the rebuilding process, the people came together as community, they came together singing a new song. They were together for joy.

Together for joy. That is the theme for our annual giving campaign this year – you know that time of the year when the temperatures get cooler, the leaves start changing, Christmas items start appearing at the stores, and the church (and if my email is any indication – many organizations) ask you to think about contributions of time, talent and yes, money. Over the next few weeks you will hear from me, Rebekah, and some members of the congregation about stewardship. About the importance of giving. About giving from abundance and not scarcity. You will hear us talk about how we have been good stewards of the resources you have given us this past year and our plans, goals, and dreams for the upcoming year. You will hear me ask you – each of you - to remember that we are better together. We must connect and reconnect. Our connections to each other and as a community have been frayed as we have weathered staff transitions and the COVID-19 pandemic. You will also hear me ask you to financially support this community of faith as we seek to sing new songs.

Like the Israelites from long ago we cannot stand on nostalgia for the way things have been in the past. We must build for the future. We must not be afraid to do new things, to sing new songs. We can look to Jesus for inspiration. A few minutes ago Rebekah read a healing story from the Gospel of Luke. It is an unusual healing story in that Jesus healed someone out outside of the Jewish faith. A Roman centurion sent some Jewish elders to Jesus asking him to come to his home and heal his slave. This is a pretty nery request. After all the Romans were the occupying force in Palestine, an oppressive government, heavily taxing the people to subsidize their expansive conquests. Jesus could have easily refused the request. This

⁵ Nehemiah 8:6, 9-10

would have been in keeping with Jewish laws and customs of the time. But instead, Jesus sang a new song. The centurion expressed his confidence in Jesus healing his slave, saying that he knew Jesus could heal him with just a word. As Luke recounts, when Jesus heard this he was amazed at the centurion, and, turning to the crowd following him, Jesus said, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.” Talk about singing a new song! This healing was early in Jesus ministry and Jesus showed his disciples and the crowds and the Roman occupiers that he was fulfilling the law to love God and love your neighbor in ways different from the past. He was building a community that included those who were typically excluded. Brick by brick, person by person, healing by healing, teaching by teaching, Jesus sought to build the beloved community, singing a new song.

Building and rebuilding community is not an easy thing. Jesus met opposition not just from the outside Roman occupying force, but also from the religious leaders in his own community. While the Pharisees may not have coined the phrase, “We have always done it this way”, they certainly were not shy in speaking their piece when Jesus colored outside the lines. And yet, Jesus was called to bring light into the darkness, to bring forgiveness and grace, to die on the cross to save us from our sins. Jesus was called to bring joy into our hearts when we hear the news of the empty tomb.

Building and rebuilding community is not an easy thing. When the Israelites returned from exile they had to deal with the frustrations of rebuilding Jerusalem – rebuilding their temple – the city walls – their houses – their streets – everything that was destroyed by the Babylonians as they conquered the city. Think about every building or remodeling project you have been part of... everything sticks to schedule and under budget – right? Just think about assembling a piece of furniture – I’m looking at you Ikea. I read an article awhile back in a financial blog entitled “Nope, it’s not money causing the most marital rifts. It’s this project.” by Dayana Yochim. And guess what this project is? According to a survey out of Great Britain, ex-couples (note that this is ex-couples) overwhelmingly cite the task of assembling flat-pack furniture as the project that caused the most arguments. In fact, the article includes a helpful link to the 10 most difficult pieces of IKEA furniture to assemble. So if you want peace in your household, stay away from the NORDLI floating headboard bed, the PAX wardrobe and the HEMNES dresser.⁶ And for some personal self-disclosure, I would have to say that my husband Brian and I have been down that IKEA assembly road a few times that haven’t been very pretty.

It is into this stress and tension of wanting – of deeply desiring – a rebuilt community and seeing so much need that the psalmists words speak. The people are urged to look up and see the light, to sing a new song. To remember that God will not abandon them. They are urged to see what is not yet there, to believe the fulfillment of God’s promise to build anew.

⁶ <https://hermoney.com/invest/real-estate/nope-its-not-money-causing-the-most-marital-rifts-its-this-project/>

That too is our call this year at PCO, to build anew and sing some new songs. While many of songs will have familiar refrains, some of the verses may sound different. The Agape meal will return the week before Thanksgiving, as will a Christmas Eve service with opportunities for children, youth and adults to participate. And yet the specifics may be different than in the past. We will celebrate these new songs, rather than seeking comfort in nostalgia. The church committee Parish Life is rebranding itself and expanding the ways we seek to build community at PCO. Yes, we will still have Sunday fellowship time and birthday cake Sunday, and yet we will seek to build community through supporting and expanding the small groups that nurture our growing faith. Parish Life sang a new song this summer with PCO Out on the Town events – a professional women’s football game, an outdoor play, a concert by the lake and a Lugnuts baseball game provided opportunities to make new friends, strengthen relationships, and be together for joy.

One of the ways we can build and rebuild community is to get know each other better, to find common connections that we might not even realize we have. During the next four weeks, we will have an opportunity to do that in a unique way. Beginning tomorrow and each weekday through November 11, I will be putting a prompt on our Facebook and Instagram feeds. I invite you to respond (which means that if you are on social media haven’t liked or followed the church yet, now is a good time to do so). Share the prompts on your own pages and learn something new about your friends. And if you are not on social media, don’t worry! We have a way for you to participate. On the bulletin board in Fellowship Hall, you will see two of the prompts each week (thank you Eunice!). There will be space for you to share your answers. And if you are unable to be here in person, we will include these two prompts in the weekly e-announcements as well, and you can email us your responses and we will add them. And just so you can start thinking, the first question is “What are your three favorite hymns that make you burst into jubilant song?” I can’t wait to see the responses!

As a people of faith, we have a choice. We can long for the comfort of nostalgia and the ways things used to be. Or we can embrace the new songs to which God is calling us. Let us look to Israelites to whom the psalmist wrote. They were confident in singing a new song for they knew God had done marvelous things. God has done marvelous things here at PCO this past year and In years past. God will continue to do marvelous things here at PCO. Let us celebrate this promise of steadfast love and faithfulness as we live *Together for Joy*. Join me in prayer....