

Rev. Lisa Schrott  
October 23, 2022  
Psalm 98:4-6  
Together for Joy: Our Songs

We are continuing our worship series *Together for Joy*. This morning we hear the middle section of Psalm 98.

**Psalm 98:4-6**

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;  
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.  
Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre,  
with the lyre and the sound of melody.  
With trumpets and the sound of the horn,  
make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord.

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

It is not hard for the Presbyterian Church of Okemos to make a joyful noise to the Lord. From voices raised to handbells to the organ to the euphonium and tuba we heard last week, we joyfully break forth in song each week in worship. This morning I want to extend the metaphor of the orchestra and consider the various instruments we employ at PCO to sing praise and bring glory to God.

Last week as I preached on the “new songs” we are being called to create in this next chapter of life at PCO, I mentioned that many of these songs may have the same refrain as songs in the past, but we will add new verses. And just what is that refrain? It is God’s mission and we the church are called to bear this witness into the world.

The Presbyterian Church Book of Order tells us that “In Christ, the Church participates in God’s mission for the transformation of creation and humanity by proclaiming to all people the good news of God’s love, offering to all people the grace of God at font and table, and calling all people to discipleship in Christ. ... The Gospel of Jesus Christ announces the nearness of God’s kingdom, bringing good news to all who are impoverished, sight to all who are blind, freedom to all who are oppressed, and proclaiming the Lord’s favor upon all creation.”<sup>1</sup> That sounds pretty daunting doesn’t it? And yet the words of the mission statement of PCO echo this call. Our mission statement says,

“The Church exists to invite everyone to join the lifelong journey of faith that is life in Jesus Christ.

Through Worship that glorifies God,  
Study that seeks to understand God,  
Service to a world that needs God,

---

<sup>1</sup> PC(USA) Constitution Part I. The Book of Order 2019-2023. F-1.01 God’s Mission.

We desire to build a network of caring relationships  
Between families, friends, and strangers  
By offering welcome, healing, justice and peace to all in the name of Jesus Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

Sounds daunting, doesn't it? Sounds pretty aspirational, doesn't it? Yet this church has been living this call - singing these songs - for almost 60 years. To better appreciate how we might sing new verses, it is helpful to reflect on the songs from the past. Some of these we know so well that they are so ingrained in our brains that we don't even appreciate how significant they are. Some happened awhile back and we are fuzzy on the details or we were not yet part of this community so that we don't know their backstory.

During the interim period after Rob Carlson's retirement, PCO conducted a mission study that gave direction to the pastor nominating committees that conducted the searches for my position as Pastor/Head of Staff and Rebekah's position as Associate Pastor. The mission study was shared with me during my conversations with the PNC. I was blown away by it. I mean really impressed. As I was in the call process, I read a lot of church mission studies and PCO's is special. First off it was well written, well organized, with enough detail to help me understand the nuances of the church, but not so much that my eyes glazed over and I cried TLTR (too long to read). And bonus points for the graphs of actual data about the church. As I read the study, I could feel the love and connectedness of the congregation, the justifiable pride in the accomplishments, especially with respect to mission as well as the hopes and dreams of the next chapter. The songs of the past are inspirational and aspirational. I also very much appreciated the transparency and integrity that was communicated – recognizing places where the church had experienced dissension and struggles. This part of the song is important too – for it adds character and depth and means that the members are willing to devote effort and energy into fulfilling God's mission.

One of the most revealing statements in the study was about mission: “The members of the church have expressed a deep sense of commitment to mission activities.” I was struck first by the language “the members of the church”. It was not that the church supports this organization or that organization, rather it is “members of the of the church” who have “deep sense of commitment.” A deep sense of commitment to mission. Friends, in the nearly one year that I have served here, I can truly say that this statement is an accurate reflection of this congregation. From the recent CROP Walk to preparing meals for Loaves and Fishes and Advent House, to collections of food, pajamas, socks and underwear, winter coats, dishes and household items for refugee families, school supplies for students in Lansing, Cuba and Sierra Leone, the members of this community have shown a deep commitment to mission.

This past week I had the opportunity to learn more about the mission history of PCO from two visionary leaders in this church – Jerry Veldman and Larry Faris. In a Zoom call, Jerry shared

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.okemospres.org/our-mission/>

the history of the Haiti Nursing Foundation and PCO's instrumental role in its founding. What a difference in the world this organization makes! Since its opening in 2005 and its first graduating class in 2009, the nursing school, known as FSIL, has had 225 graduates in the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program and 16 Family Nurse Practitioner graduates.<sup>3</sup>

I had the joy attending the Haiti Nursing Foundation annual fundraising gala on Friday night, along with some of the members of the mission committee. At the gala, I sat with Larry and Pat Faris. Larry shared with me about his time as a pastor here in the 1980's, including the story of the founding of Loaves and Fishes, a ministry for the unhoused. Larry told me how PCO paid off the shelter's land contract, and that our church's youth painted murals of Bible stories on the walls of the shelter.

These stories are not stories of what the church has done, rather they are stories of what individual members in ministry have done, when everyone's gifts have been put together. This is what discipleship means...following Jesus to feed and house our neighbors in the Lansing area, and to provide a healing touch for our neighbors in Haiti. The cost and joy of discipleship. The apostle Paul tells us, in the passage Rebekah read just a bit ago, "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

Think about these things...the shoulders we stand on here at PCO... these projects and outreach and mission trips and collection...these things that are honorable and just and pure and pleasing and commendable – rejoice in them and rejoice in the Lord – for they are the mission of God and they are our songs. They are our witness and our testimony.

Our songs also include a history of welcome. From the early days of what would become PCO, the welcome extended beyond just those who identified as Presbyterian, to those of other denominations or no denomination at all. To families and singles, to young and old. The welcome extended to the LGTBQ community, with the Presbyterian Church of Okemos hosting the first Lansing area PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbian and Gay Persons) group in the 1980's. PCO is a member of the Covenant Network<sup>4</sup>, a collection of churches in the PC(USA) which work for full inclusion of all people in the body of Christ. Friends, this inclusive welcome is one of the shoulders we stand on here at PCO... a place where strangers become neighbors; where refugees are embraced, where the dignity of every child of God is celebrated...these things that are honorable and just and pure and pleasing and commendable – and we rejoice in them and rejoice in the Lord – for radical welcome is a mission of God and radical welcome is one of our songs. It is our witness and it is our testimony.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.haitinursing.org/about>

<sup>4</sup> <https://covnetpres.org/>

Our witnessing to others begins with the acknowledgement of our own need to be rooted and built up. It begins with an acknowledgement that we are imperfect people, muddling our way through life, striving to draw closer to God's will for our life. We know that we fall short. And we know God can and will use us anyway.

In his book *Love Does*, Bob Goff relays a story about his wedding day. He and his wife had no money – he was just out of law school and working as a Young Life volunteer. The wedding was at nice venue – his boss donated the use of a lovely neighborhood club house, but to save money they had balloons instead of flowers and the food was pasta salad they made themselves. But they splurged on the cake – 4 stories tall, with pillars and all the trimming. The bakers assembled the layers in the parking lot of the club house, put it on a cart to wheel in, and you can guess what happened. The cake fell off the cart. This is how Goff describes it...

“In rapid succession, each layer of the cake fell off of its pillars and headed toward the parking lot. Three splats later, most of our wedding cake was lying on the asphalt in a pile. We all just kind of stood there without speaking, looking at the pile of cake in stunned silence, the bride and groom ornaments lying silently on the top looking like they just had a massive food fight.

Calling for some quick thinking as the guests were about to arrive any minute, I pulled my shell-shocked baker aside between two parked cars and we hatched a plan. He scooped the cake together and jumped into his well-used Subaru. Thirty minutes later, he was back with a bucket of shredded cake and an even bigger bucket of freshly made icing from the bakery. In the back room, he iced the shards of the cake back into shape, restacked it and yes, I am a little embarrassed to say – we served it up. Gravel, small bits of asphalt and all.”<sup>5</sup>

Goff goes onto talk about how that cake is a lot like each one of us... a bit broken, glued together with some icing, some small rocks and asphalt clinging to our skin from where we have fallen, and Jesus can use us. Goff concludes:

“Jesus seemed to say that all we would need to do is to scrape together the pieces of our lives that had fallen on the ground, bring those pieces to Him, and He would start using them. Jesus didn't say He would ice over the grit of faults and failures either; He said He would use us in spite of the grit and faults and failures. What we would have to do is decide to move from the parking lot to the party. And He said we can't do that by just believing all the right stuff anymore; Jesus said He'd help us start doing the right stuff.”<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Bob Goff. *Love Does: Discover a Secretly Incredible Life in an Ordinary World*. Thomas Nelson Publishing 2012, p55-56

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p56

Friends, we are called to move from the parking lot to the party. To embrace being a disciple of Christ. The life of a follower of Jesus is not a one-shot deal, not a one-time confession of a prayer, not a one-time immersion in water. It is a song – it is our song - an old song whose refrain we know and love and with new verses that challenge us. It is a song of recognition that the light and hope we live with must be nurtured. It is a song to embody the ministry of Christ inviting and welcoming all to the table. It is song of service recognizing our deep connection to each other whether around the corner or around the world. Our songs – the songs of PCO – are played by the individual instruments – by every member in ministry. And when these instruments are played together, magic happens.

Moving from the parking lot to the party involves risk. It means we are willing to boldly step out in faith. It means believing that Jesus would use us in spite of our grit and faults and failures. Just like those in whose footsteps we follow here at PCO, those who stepped out in faith to found this church, to birth missions who touched lives far and wide, to invite those other churches failed to welcome. It means we know we are better together and that we are together for joy. It means we are willing to give – to give our money, our time, and our energy.

In a few minutes you will hear one our PCO family Dave Detrisac share his reasons for giving to this community – for supporting this congregation with financial gifts. I invite each of you to prayerfully consider your move from the parking lot to the party – how you can step up and contribute to the important work of this church, the work of fulfilling God’s mission of service and welcome. The stewardship brochure, which you can pick up the morning or will receive in the mail, shares the ways we have been singing our songs this past year, as well as our dreams and hopes of the songs of 2023. I invite you to not just read the booklet, but to come to the party, bring your instrument – your trumpets and your lyre, and make a joyful noise to the Lord with your gifts. Join me in prayer.