

Welcome and Announcements – September 6, 2020

Next Sunday – Rally Day from 11 a.m. – noon at the church. It will be a time to see each other, pray, and share God’s love. Masks and distancing required. Staying in your car to receive a blessing is also an option. We will spend most of that time outside in the Memorial Garden. The sanctuary will be open to reconnect with our sacred space. (Video will be posted later on Facebook.)

Prelude: *Softly and Tenderly*

Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling, calling, O sinner, come home!

Gathering Around God’s Word

Opening Prayer –

Sing a new song to the Lord.

Sing God’s praise from the end of the earth! Hear that song resonate from the sea to the desert. Crying out like a man of war. Crying out like a woman in labor. (Isaiah 42)

Sing a new song to the Lord.

The Lord brings the counsels of nations to nothing, and frustrates the plans of the peoples. NEVERTHELESS, the counsels of the Lord stand forever. The thoughts of God’s heart go out to all generations. The eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, who hope in his steadfast love. (Psalm 33)

Sing a new song to the Lord.

Tell of God’s salvation from day to day. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised, revered above all other gods. The gods people worship are idols. Say among the nations: The Lord is King! The Lord will judge the peoples with equity. The Lord will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with truth. (Psalm 96)

Sing a new song to the Lord.

Let the sea roar. Let the floods clap their hands. Let the hills sing in joy. The Lord will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity. (Psalm 98)

Sing a new song to the Lord.

Blessed be the Lord, my rock, my fortress, my stronghold. What are human beings that you have regard for them? Mortals that you think of them? Our days are like a breath, like a shadow to you. Rescue me from the cruel sword, deliver me from the hands of my enemies, who lie and swear false oaths. (Psalm 144)

Sing a new song to the Lord.

Let Israel be glad in its Maker, the children of Zion rejoicing in their King. Let the high praises of God be in their throats and two-edged swords in their hands to execute vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, to bind their kings with fetters and their nobles with chains of iron. (Psalm 149)

Sing a new song to the Lord.

The saints sing a new song for the Lamb of God who was slaughtered: You are worthy. By your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth. To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever! (Revelation 5:9-14)

Sing a new song to the Lord.

Opening Hymn: O for A Closer Walk with God (Tune: Dalehurst, #397)

1. O for a closer walk with God,
A calm and heavenly frame,
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb!

2. Return, O holy Dove, return,
Sweet messenger of rest!
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn
And drove Thee from my breast.

3. The dearest idol I have known,
What-e'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee.

4. So shall my walk be close with God,
Calm and serene my frame;
So purer light shall mark the road
That leads me to the Lamb.

God's Word

Psalm 149

- ¹ Praise the LORD!
Sing to the LORD a new song,
his praise in the assembly of the faithful.
- ² Let Israel be glad in its Maker;
let the children of Zion rejoice in their King.
- ³ Let them praise his name with dancing,
making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.

⁴For the LORD takes pleasure in his people;
he adorns the humble with victory.
⁵Let the faithful exult in glory;
let them sing for joy on their couches.
⁶Let the high praises of God be in their throats
and two-edged swords in their hands,
⁷to execute vengeance on the nations
and punishment on the peoples,
⁸to bind their kings with fetters
and their nobles with chains of iron,
⁹to execute on them the judgment decreed.
This is glory for all his faithful ones.
Praise the LORD!

***Matthew 12:15-21* – Man with a Withered Hand/God’s Chosen Servant**

⁹ He left that place and entered their synagogue; ¹⁰ a man was there with a withered hand, and they asked him, “Is it lawful to cure on the sabbath?” so that they might accuse him. ¹¹ He said to them, “Suppose one of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out? ¹² How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath.” ¹³ Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and it was restored, as sound as the other. ¹⁴ But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

¹⁵ When Jesus became aware of this, he departed. Many crowds followed him, and he cured all of them, ¹⁶ and he ordered them not to make him known. ¹⁷ This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁸ “Here is my servant, whom I have chosen,
my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased.
I will put my Spirit upon him,
and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.
¹⁹ He will not wrangle or cry aloud,
nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.
²⁰ He will not break a bruised reed
or quench a smoldering wick
until he brings justice to victory.
²¹ And in his name the Gentiles will hope.”

***Isaiah 42:5-10a* – From the first Servant Song**

⁵ Thus says God, the LORD,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people upon it
and spirit to those who walk in it:

⁶ I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness,
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,
⁷ to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.
⁸ I am the LORD, that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to idols.
⁹ See, the former things have come to pass,
and new things I now declare;
before they spring forth,
I tell you of them.
¹⁰ Sing to the LORD a new song,
his praise from the end of the earth!

Sermon: Sing a New Song

Responding to God's Word:

Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

Invitation to the Table

Prayer of Great Thanksgiving and the Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Words of Institution

Communion Meditation: *As we Gather Around the Table of the Lord*

Let us adore and worship the Lord. Let us remember Him.

Prayer after Communion

Response: Doxology

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him all creatures, here below;

Praise Him above, ye heav'nly host; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Sending Us Out to Be God's Word in the World

Closing Hymn: *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind*

1. Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
Forgive our foolish ways;
Reclothe us in our rightful minds,
In purer lives Thy service find,
In deeper reverence, praise.

2. Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain of stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace.

***Congregational Meeting to Elect Officers (Roger Cole, Vicki Neeley, Terry Alexander)**

Charge and Benediction

Postlude: *All Nature's Works His Praise Declare*

Great God, to Thee we consecrate our voices and our skill.

We bid the pealing organ wait to speak alone Thy will.

Lord, while the music round us floats may earth born passions die;

O grant its rich and swelling notes may lift our souls on high!

Kerra Becker English

September 6, 2020

Sing a New Song

The story of Jesus healing the man with the withered hand appears in all three of the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And yet, it's a story that, if you follow only the lectionary, will never be read out loud in worship on a Sunday, never get preached on, and perhaps never get known by generations of Christians. You "might" hear it in Sunday school – but then again, those lessons are told from a child's perspective. What if we hear it as adults? What if we have to process it and understand what Jesus is saying and doing – not just then – but in ways we might see it being applicable to our lives now?

I almost didn't include that story this week. It's coming in through a back door in my biblical preparation for preaching this Sunday. You see, I promised to preach Matthew through Advent, and I just wasn't excited about the actual lectionary text on dealing with conflict in the church, and how to address it that comes from Matthew 16. I could have gone there, but I was bored with my own ideas on that one, and if I'm bored preaching it, I guarantee you would be bored hearing it. So, I went with what I did get excited about - the appearance of a familiar line in the lectionary Psalm for the day. "Sing to the Lord a new song." I'll go there first – and get back to Matthew in a minute.

"Sing a new song to the Lord" spoke to me because I've been feeling music-deprived - church music deprived in particular. I confess that I never, ever listen to Christian radio – which means for me the music of the church is what I hear when WE are together, and for me it is about that word - TOGETHER. It's a case of having to be there – singing – or in my case

“making a joyful noise” to the Lord. *Sing to the Lord a new song*. I started to wonder what that sentence might mean in a time when singing is the most dangerous thing we could do at church. That seems wild, doesn’t it? Singing together having the potential for causing trouble. When the singing must stop for a time, I wonder, what kind of new song might emerge?

Today’s preaching hacks are so amazing compared to my early years in the ministry. Now, you’ll know my secret. Harnessing the power and speed of the internet, I can go on to a Bible search engine, type in “Sing a new song” and find out EXACTLY when and where that sentence appears in scripture in oh, about a second. Now you know how I put together our opening prayer. I looked it up, and then looked for common themes around what it might mean Biblically to “Sing a new song.” And I found out that phrase shows up in 5 different Psalms, the first servant song in Isaiah 42, and in the book of Revelation. That’s it. But still, that tells me that it wasn’t an unknown concept either. “Sing a new song to the Lord” means something – but what exactly?

The similarity that I found was that every time that phrase was used in a prayer it was used prophetically. Something is up. Something is being changed, transformed, renewed. We aren’t singing the same OLD songs. We are singing a NEW song. The former things have come to pass – and a new way of being is being ushered in with music and with praise, but not without some hard work involved in getting there. The whole of creation participates – the sea, the hills, the desert. People participate – crying out like a soldier, or like a woman in labor. We are handed double-edged swords to fight the wrongs of this world, and Israel is given the charge to challenge unjust systems by imprisoning kings and nobles who are treating the people unfairly. Every time this phrase comes up – we are also reminded that God is the ultimate

judge, of peoples, of nations, of the WORLD, and God always acts with justice, righteousness, and equity. In Isaiah, both blind eyes and prison doors are opened. The small-g gods who have been worshipped for too long are revealed for the idols that they are so that the only music in our ears is the new song of the Lord Almighty. Perhaps it's quietest in the time when the old song is passing and the new song has yet to come into being.

It gives me shivers. This is powerful Biblical language. And in this section of Matthew I read today, I hear the gospel writer pulling on that same narrative to speak about Jesus, both in the telling of this healing story and then directly connecting it to Isaiah's prophetic servant song.

Back to the story of Jesus healing the man with the withered hand. The basics of the story are the same in the three gospels that share it – Mark and Luke also tell versions of this story. Jesus performs this particular healing in front of the Pharisees, on the Sabbath – to test the laws that prohibit doing any work on the day of rest. It is intentional provocation, and it works. It works pretty well I might add in that all the texts talk about how much their anger was kindled against him in this moment. It was a form of public protest. But Matthew tells something in the story that the other two don't, and I find this part so intriguing. He asks them whether or not they would pull their one sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath. The answer to that is yes. They would protect their property that was in danger of being lost. "But then," Jesus asks, "How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep!"

I hope you hear the same echoes in that passage that I do. Jesus is confronting them over which lives matter. Does one's property matter most, like the sheep? Or does healing the

man's infirmity matter because it gives him his life back after being thought of as sinful and "lesser than" for being impaired? The old ways get bogged down by our practices and prejudices. We stir up the same old systems and deepen the divides that they create. We get to those places where we have to pause and ask ourselves about how we treat other human lives. What laws, what practices are getting in our way of seeing the value of healing the very wounds we have created? What will turn us toward knowing and practicing God's righteousness and justice and equity? When we lose our way, we also lose our voice, our song. And a new song needs to emerge – with passion, with power, with hope.

Because of Matthew's perspective on this story, let us hear Jesus unequivocally saying that human lives are much more valuable than property. And, those human lives on the margins, the infirm, the afflicted, the oppressed, need to be heard, need to be sung and celebrated, and Jesus was doing just that. Which means that Matthew starts preaching here – he connects this story and links it directly to Isaiah 42, the first of Isaiah's servant songs. He concludes that Jesus is the fulfillment of the new song. He's bringing it to us, breathing it into our hearts, so it can come out of our mouths with praise, and joy, and hope for a NEW future.

Matthew tells us that Jesus IS the servant God has chosen, the beloved with whom God is pleased. Why? Because Jesus is the embodiment of justice, the personification of righteousness, the champion of equity, because Jesus is opening blind eyes, setting prisoners free, and singing a whole new song to the Lord. He IS the new song to the Lord.

Now there will always be those who refuse to sing anything new – right? We clamor for the old songs, the old familiar ways, but in this time of quiet, of waiting for when we can sing

again, I hope that our voices will hear and resound with something fresh, something that draws us toward the vision of the Psalms, the prophetic word of Isaiah, and the revelation of a new heaven and new earth where saints from every tribe and language, of every people and nation can be heard.

Yes, I'm primarily speaking metaphorically here – when we come back together in a time when singing is possible, you can bet that we will fill our Sundays with all the songs we know by heart. But maybe you will hear them in new ways – that “Be Thou My Vision” will strike a chord of this justice, righteousness, and equity that is the song of the future as well as being a song from the past. When we begin to hear the new – may it include the prophets, the saints, the devoted followers of Jesus Christ – all as we dream of a future in which we can and will be transformed by the grace of God to sing that new song - to the Lord. Amen.