

Bellaire Community United Methodist Church

April 16, 2017

“A Song of Salvation”

Lent: A Series of Psalms, part 7. Easter Sunday

Christ Candle and Easter Proclamation

Walk forward

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
In him was life,
and that life was the light of all people.
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.
The light of Christ rises in glory,
overcoming the darkness of sin and death.

Set candle on the altar/table.

Leader: Christ is risen!

People: He is risen indeed!

Leader: Christ is risen!

People: He is risen indeed!

All: Alleluia!

Luke 24:1-12 and Psalm 98

Good morning. I don't believe we can ever proclaim the joyous truth of Easter too much. Would you say it with me again? "He is risen! He is risen indeed!" Say it like you mean it. "He is risen! He is risen indeed!"

I invite you to place your hands open wide in front of you as we pray to receive God's blessing this morning. Would you join me in prayer?

Holy, Risen Savior, Jesus Christ, we praise you this morning. We worship you, adore you, and love you. You are the author of light, life and salvation, and none of us would be here today if not for your amazing grace and the sacrifice you made for us on the cross. In this and every moment, would you pour out your Spirit upon us, opening our ears, our hearts, and our minds, so that we can receive all that you have for us? Challenge and transform us, Lord, for you are our rock and our salvation. Amen.

What is your favorite song? You know the one: when it comes on the radio, you immediately crank up the volume, roll down the windows, and sing at the top of your voice. Or, if you're a little more subdued, you sing it in the shower. I'm going to give you thirty seconds to share that song with your neighbor. Ready? Go.

What were some of the songs you came up with? (*Solicit a couple of answers.*) I have noticed that music seems to be a language that expresses every condition of the soul. We have songs for national pride, like the Star Spangled Banner and God Bless America. We have songs of victory; fight songs for sports teams. There are love songs, birthday songs, Christmas and Easter songs, and sad songs. Neil Diamond said, "Song sung blue; everybody knows one." For each and every emotion we feel, some artist or composer has written music to express it.

But I wonder, at the break of dawn on the very first Easter Sunday, what kind of song were the women singing on the way to Jesus' tomb? I guess, if anything, it was a mournful, somber, quiet song. There were tears in their eyes; I wonder if they had the strength to sing at all. Jesus, whom they loved, the one they thought would save them, was lying dead in a cold grave. They had watched him suffer in the most terrible way and die on a cross. Imagine the song in their hearts.

But their tune quickly changed to one of confusion. The heavy stone was rolled away! The grave was empty! I think instead of music, their song must have sounded like a traffic jam. And then the angels appeared, and their melody changed to fright. And after the angels had explained that Jesus was risen, did they imagine refrains of Handel's Messiah? Were they singing some early form of "Hallelujah, Hallelujah"?

The beauty of the psalms is that they form a collection that expresses the wide range of emotions we feel. There are hymns, praises, laments, curses, love songs to God, and expressions of anger and confusion. There is a psalm for every occasion, and I believe the Psalm 98 best fits these women's emotions as they returned from Jesus' grave with the good news that he had risen.

Psalm 98 is a song of salvation. The first three verses make it clear.

"Sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done marvelous things;
his right hand and his holy arm
have worked salvation for him.

²The LORD has made his salvation known
and revealed his righteousness to the nations.

³He has remembered his love
and his faithfulness to Israel;

all the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.

The basic message of Psalm 98 is: God has saved us! The song of salvation, as we know it today, is the truth that God sent his own Son into the world to redeem us. Through the blood of Jesus Christ, we have forgiveness from sin. That is the best news ever, and it is worth singing about.

But in the midst of this good news, there is something that troubles me, and I want to share it with you. You see, Psalm 98 is full of great imagery. But who sings this salvation song today? Not literally, you understand, but if you set Psalm 98 to music, please let me know. Who sings this song? Who plays the trumpet, the harp, and other loud instruments to praise God for saving them? Not many people. I am guessing that most of you here today have heard this tune before. But instead of cranking up the volume on this message, it has become like elevator music to us. “Jesus died. Jesus rose again. Yeah, I’ve heard that one before.” We have stopped paying attention to the song.

The psalmist declared that everyone should shout for joy. All nations. The ends of the earth. But something happened. The people didn’t raise their voices enough. So the seas, the rivers and the mountains got in on the song. They shouted, clapped their imaginary hands, and did the praising that the people should have been doing.

We should be joining in this song. It should be the one that we can’t get out of our head. “God saves. God saves. God saves.” This should be the deepest cry of our hearts and the loudest song from our lips.

Maybe you didn’t even know you needed saving. Maybe you’ve never turned on your spiritual radio and tuned in to what God is doing in this world. Let me help you adjust your dial.

God created you. God loves you. God formed you for a relationship that is meant to be full of joy and purpose. But our human condition has prevented us from fully experiencing the life God has for us. Each of us makes selfish decisions because of our sinful nature, and no one has ever lived a perfect life according to God's standards. We think we can just get by – just hum the words, but we don't know the song. Our choices break God's heart, and nothing we can do on our own will ever restore us. We needed God to act on our behalf. Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, came to earth 2000 years ago, living a perfect, self-less life, and even though he was perfect, innocent, and holy – he was falsely accused and sentenced to the worst death possible – dying on a cross. The sin of the world was placed on Jesus. Your sin. My sin. For a moment, it seemed the music died.

But through the amazing power of God, Jesus was resurrected. This morning we celebrate his return to life. The proof is the empty tomb, the most incredible, amazing miracle in the history of the world. God offers us a choice – sing and dance with Jesus, or go solo and not even be a one-hit wonder. When we trust in Jesus alone for forgiveness and eternal life, we are saved. And out of gratitude for what God has done for us, we commit our lives to following Jesus. We sing his song. We worship God and live for the things Jesus lived for – truth, grace, forgiveness, restoration, justice, and ministry to the last, the least, and the lost.

We come on Easter, many of us, because it is tradition. It's the same reason we sing Christmas carols. But do we know the truth behind that tradition? Do we sing the song just with our mouths, or with our whole mind, body, spirit, and heart? Do we believe the lyrics we sing?

This song is worth singing. It is worth sharing. Don't you want to be filled with joy, like the seas and rivers and mountains? Yes! We want the whole world to hear God's song of salvation!

There are two "verses" to the song I can teach you today, baptism and communion, the only two sacraments in the United Methodist Church. We get to celebrate both today. But the full impact of those acts will only be felt by those who understand how great God's love is for us and who respond to that love in the symphony of their life. Don't let Easter be a one-hit wonder. Let Easter be the song that you sing today and every day: "God loves me; Jesus died for me; and God's family wants me to join the chorus."

If you've never trusted your life to Jesus, take this moment to pray and do just that. When we baptize, think about your own baptism. If you haven't yet been baptized, talk to someone after the service. When we receive communion, remember the story of God's love. Remember you are a part of it. Take every moment of every day and add your voice to the song of salvation.

One more time: He is risen! He is risen indeed! He is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah! Amen!

Memory verse

Psalm 98:1 – Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things.

Reflection questions

1. What is your favorite song? How do you think God feels about that song?
2. What song would have you sung on your way to Jesus' tomb? What song would have you sung on the way back?
3. Have you trusted in Jesus Christ alone to save you from sin and give you eternal life? If so, when? If not, what's stopping you?
4. How will you live your life and sing the song of salvation to others?