

## Sing

### **Sermon for Christmas Day, December 25, 2022**

Readings: Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 1:1-4; John 1:1-14

Hear again a few verses from the readings appointed for this Christmas morning, one from Isaiah, one from the Psalmist, three from Hebrews and one from John:

“Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem.” Isaiah 52

“Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things.” Psalm 98

“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.” Hebrews 1

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.” John 1

Some points about the readings: Point one, there is singing involved. Perhaps in no other season is there such glorious singing (though Easter comes close)—none in any case so filled with song, both sacred and secular.

Some new some old, some profound some silly. But sing we do: with the radio, caroling in groups (we need to recover this tradition though), and of course in church—would that more would join and sing along.

Singing is one of the things humans share with a few other animals, birds of course, whales, the occasional dog and wolf howling at the moon. If we broaden the image to include dancing—well, how many amazing and sometimes weird and amusing are animal (and human) mating dances, courtship rituals.

The Psalmist sings that the lands are called to sing as well: Let the sea make a noise and all that is in it, let the rivers clap their hands and let the hills ring out with joy before the Lord.

There are perhaps sacred songs sung by stars—so thought the ancients. and who can say what our new telescopes will hear some day. Sing to the Lord a new song indeed.

Song is somehow especially appropriate for worship. Song is sacred. God not only approves but positively commands us—and all creation—to sing in wonder, love and praise.

Even in suffering sing, as the prophet commands the ruins of Jerusalem. Even if you have been destroyed by the conquerors, your temple desecrated and reduced to rubble, your people killed and carried off in bondage, your city abandoned to the jackals and lions, your countryside desolate. Even so, sing, for redemption is coming. God is on the move. In your life too. Have faith, hope. The great Black tradition of the blues is part of a larger tradition of sacred music. Eros and agape, sexual and self-giving love are kin.

Point two: How do we know? Where is the evidence? Show me the signs.

Well, you have from long ago heard the prophets speak in the name of God prophecies of God's forgiveness and redemption, the return of the exiles, the restoration of Zion. You have witnessed the fall of great empires, the freeing of the captives, the return to Jerusalem. You have seen the prophets vindicated. And they also spoke of one who is to come, a child and son of David, a messiah. And you have seen a new song, a new word in the Word made flesh. Such a word as no song ever sung before, but which many have sung since. A word combining heaven and earth, human and divine, a perfect image of the Almighty yet born from the womb of a young virgin, a baby wrapped in cloth and laid in a manger, without a proper home, yet worshipped by both shepherds and magi. Such a song as never has been sung before or since—so reaching both high and low, strong and weak, vulnerable yet destined to become the most powerful and influential single person in human history.

His story has been told and told again over the two millennia since—the song ever sung, the song always new. The song that includes both birth and death, and a new thing, risen and eternal life. Such a song and such a life as to give us hope and guidance, such a Spirit as to give us power and courage, such a friend that even as judge we who are sinners and broken have faith and hope that we will be clothed in love and grace. And so we are called to love and serve the world in his name. To make his song ours, tuned in as many distinctive versions as we are individuals and peoples.

Point three: Ready to go. Here we are this morning, a little tired, a little cold—it has been some bitter weather. We will go out to a challenging world and a new year with great dangers and darkness. But we will be bearing a light into the darkness. The true light, which enlightens everyone, has come into the world,

and we are not going to be the people who let it go out. Like John, we are called to be witnesses to the light.

and this is our time, our chance to make a new song, to teach our children the old ones and invite them to join in the long march to a better world.

Are you ready to go? Maybe, you're thinking, after the presents are all unwrapped, the families feast all cleaned up, and a week of vacation and new year celebrating is over (and all the poor folks trapped in airports are home). Well, even in this holiday season we sing and celebrate—perhaps even more than other times. So let us make our singing and celebration a part of what it means to bring Christ's light into the world. Be people of joy as well as earnest well meaning and good doing, faith and hope. Have fun, laugh—clap your hands like the rivers, ring out with joy like the hills—that is, naturally. We are made to hug and smile—as we know from how babies flourish when held and smiled at—or fail to flourish when deprived.

Perhaps this is why we have stories of baby Jesus. To remind us that God became human, the Word was made flesh, first as a newborn. So if you don't have one of those around, at least look at pictures of those who do. Which I did the other day when Heather shared pictures of her baby Jacob. He just discovered with great delight that he has toes. And he can put them in his mouth. Isn't that wonderful? Sing to the Lord a new song.

In Christ's name, amen.

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