

“A New Song”

Psalm 98

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The psalmist is a person who carves out time for discerning the new things God is doing. The psalmist notices that new light is constantly being revealed, that God’s wisdom is forever evolving. The writer of the Psalms is constantly in search of new language, new vocabulary, new metaphors to describe the ever-deepening understanding of God’s presence in the universe. Thus, the praise song written last month is no longer adequate to capture the joy that is felt in this present moment. A new song is needed!

It’s exciting to me to think that the song or the love letter or the praise message that worked last week is no longer adequate to express this week’s joy! Perhaps, that is why Johann Sebastian Bach composed an original prelude for his church’s worship every single week! He kept finding inspiration as he lived fully into each new day! He allowed time for discernment.

Perhaps this helps us understand how the poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, began one of her sonnets:

“How do I love thee?
Let me count the ways.”

One has the feeling that this could be an unending love poem; new stanzas added each week! Oops! I thought of one more way I love you! She allowed time for discernment.

The composer of Psalm 98 is keenly aware of the newness of each day, the freshness of each sunrise, the originality of each blossom, the intimacy of each friendship, the delight of each aroma.

One wonders if the psalmist has a day job! Or just how does he or she find the time to do this discerning work? I am envious!

One thing is clear: in the psalm writer's theology, God is not stagnant; God did not create the world in six days and then sit back in an easy chair to be a permanent spectator. God is on the move, generating new communities, doing the work of liberation, reconciling warring neighbors, equipping saints for ministries of peace and justice. Thus, the hymn that describes what God was up to last week requires an additional verse to name what God is up to this week!

What I find is that God's wonders are constantly being revealed in the people we love; in the people we meet each day; in the people we call friends, even in the people we aren't too crazy about. The earliest disciples were fortunate to meet and to know Jesus of Nazareth. For, in him, the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. As the disciples got to know this son of Mary and Joseph, they got to know God. My own belief is that the risen Christ dwells in the hearts of people everywhere; in the hearts of mothers and fathers, sons and daughters. So, if I want to know God more deeply, more broadly, I need to meet and encounter as many different people as I can. One answer to the question: 'what is my purpose in life?' would be to know as much as I can possibly know of God by exposing myself to the richness of humanity's diversity.

Earlier in April, when we headed to Malawi, I quietly hoped we would run into a young man named Oswell Sedo. Orphaned at an early age, born without the use of his legs, and crippled by a gross stutter in his speech; Oswell gets around in a wheelchair rigged to operate with arm power. Oswell happens to have super intelligence when it comes to mathematics. Watching his brain calculate formulas, I feel I am in the presence of Albert Einstein. Oswell has acquired a simple computer which connects him to the internet, and he has opened the first internet café in the Chezi region. People line up at his booth to check their e-mail.

Thus, he supports himself. His heart is even larger than his brain. Rarely does one witness a human being so physically compromised, yet so spiritually gifted. On the day we met up with Oswell, he was helping customers download music onto discs. He was happy as a lark, smiling ear to ear, glad to be alive, glad to be bringing joy to others. He asked me to greet all of you. Can you picture him? What I see in this young man is how utterly sacred life is; how precious every day is; and how it is not our athleticism or our wealth that matters; **but how we express our gratitude in the new songs we sing to God for whatever we have been given.**

To know Oswell Sedo is to know something of the mind of God. Our mission in Malawi was not to do something **for** Oswell; it was to learn something **from** him. Thus, our mission was accomplished! Rich and Judy and Wendy and I are all singing a new song. We want to teach it to you on May 20th. Come to supper with us and we'll be singing the new song together.

Of course, today is Mother's Day. After church, I imagine many of us will be carving out some time to compose a new song to God. It will be an ode, a hymn of joy, a praise song articulating our gratitude for the woman who was our mother. For in mysterious and sometimes not so mysterious ways, our mothers revealed to us, and keep on revealing to us, the very nature of God.

In high school, I went to a boarding school. All my classmates had their laundry done by a professional cleaning service. But my mother drove to the school every week to pick up my laundry bag. She washed it and ironed it and folded it and brought it back in a day or two. As I took the folded socks and underwear and shirts out of the laundry box, there would ALWAYS be a sack of Hydrox cookies! Not Oreos. Hydrox! Those cookies with a softer outside crust and a gooier inside. This is the unconditional love of a mother. Her love revealed the unconditional love of God!

It's one thing to thank your mother for all she's meant to you. It's another thing to tell her you are thanking God for her life. Whether she is still alive or whether she has been gone for decades, perhaps it is time for a new song to be sung.

"O sing to the Lord a new song, for God has done marvelous things!" It's in singing a new song, adding verses that name what God has been doing lately, that we all remain in the greatest of hope. Amen.

