

Sing a New Song to the Lord

Friends,

Our Psalm for today says, “Sing a new song.” Do you like new songs? I suppose that depends on how you define a new song. Some think of new music as rock and roll. But 40 years ago already Bob Seeger was singing about “That Old-Time Rock and Roll,” so Rock is hardly new. Baby boomers like to claim that we like contemporary music—not realizing that what we think is contemporary was written to imitate the songs of the 1970’s. Most of us like a certain style of music, not caring how old it may be.

Yet today we are told to Sing a New Song. We sing a new song about our salvation in the Lord. We sing a new song with all the resources on earth. We sing a new song that will go on forever.

“Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things.” This new song focuses on the Lord God, who delivered us by his own power.

Before we delve into that new song, let’s think about what the “old song” would be. Our old song would focus on ourselves. If there’s a victory, I’ve got to accomplish it. That’s the old way of thinking.

But this old song so often is a song of misery. You know those days when you work harder and harder, yet never accomplish what you’re aiming for. Maybe you have a hard boss, who keeps blaming you for the failures, putting you down, maybe moving the goalposts as to what you should do. You never reach your goal. And you feel miserable about it.

That’s all the more true when it comes to salvation. Try as you might, you can’t live a perfect life. Your flesh is weak, and you keep falling into selfishness. And then the devil comes along and reminds you of what a failure you are. Yes, our “old song” is a hopeless wail.

“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.” It’s an interesting picture: God’s right hand winning the victory. Most people are right-handed; the right hand is a symbol of strength. So this is like God reaching down and defeating his enemies.

Think of the Israelites enslaved in Egypt, until the Lord sent plagues to convince the Pharaoh to let the people go. What a marvelous thing! After the people had crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, Moses sang how the Lord’s right hand had won the victory. Or think about the people of Judah taken into captivity in Babylon; yet God had the Persian king lead the Jews back to their land, apparently a unique event in history. What a marvelous thing!

But those marvelous things don’t begin to compare to what happened on Easter. After Jesus, the Son of God, was born and lived on earth and then was put to death for our sins, he was buried. The women came to his tomb on that Sunday morning, only to find the stone rolled away and an angel who announced, “He is not here.” Then Jesus appeared to his followers again and again over the next 40 days, proving he was alive once again.

If we want to sing a new song, there is nothing more marvelous to sing about than Easter. Not just for the novelty of a man rising from the dead. But this man paid for all of our sins. This

man won our forgiveness. This man opened the way to heaven for each of us. His resurrection proves that we are loved, that we are forgiven, that we are saved.

We don't need to keep singing the same old tune, whining about how bad things are or how hopeless our situation. We are saved! The Lord's right hand won our salvation! Sing a new song to the Lord!

And he won this salvation for all people, so others can join us in singing. **“The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.”** Egypt saw the Lord's salvation; Babylon was humbled at the amazing acts of God. But God's purpose always was to lead people of all nations to repent of their sins. For Jesus paid for everyone's sins.

After Easter, Jesus made this clear. He took his disciples up a mountain and told them to “Go and make disciples of all nations” by baptizing them and teaching them. The washing of Holy Baptism is intended for all people; even the worst sinner's transgressions are washed away by God in that Sacrament. And his Word teaches us that he loves and forgives everyone.

At Jesus' ascension, he told his disciples that they would be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. Our First Lesson from Acts shows how that took place. Because of persecution, Christians were forced to move to new locations. In their new homes they told their neighbors, both Jews and non-Jews, the Good News of Jesus. And a great number of people believed. And they began to sing the new song of salvation in the Lord.

So our Psalm encourages people everywhere to sing this new song. **“Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music.”** Christians just naturally want to sing God's praises—even though we aren't professional singers.

Maybe you heard the story of Isaac Watts. He grew up in England, with a very Calvinist church—think of the pilgrims, with their austere church buildings, no art, no organ, no fun songs, only plain arrangements of the Psalms. As a teenager Isaac would come home and complain about how few songs and how simple they were; finally his father told him that he should do better if he could. So Isaac started writing a new hymn based on the Psalm each week. He ended up writing 600 hymns, many of which we still sing today. Do you know his hymn based on our Psalm, Psalm 98? It was “Joy to the World.”

Martin Luther did not agree with the Calvinists. Luther thought worship should be beautiful, with art and poetry and music. Luther encouraged that all God's gifts should be used in his praise.

Sort of like our Psalm: **“Make music to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn—shout for joy to the Lord, the King.”** It's interesting to study the different instruments used in Old Testament worship, like harps. Trumpets were long and loud; and the ram's horn was an actual ram's horn, hollow inside so it formed a natural trumpet; it was so loud it was used to call troops to battle.

When we read about these instruments, it is striking that Old Testament worship was loud! That is one reason that Christians very early on began using organs, which can produce the sounds of many different instruments, and can fill a room, while also very easily leading us in singing. Today we can use all sorts of instruments, and especially the instrument of our voices, in praising our God.

But even that isn't loud enough for our Psalm. **“Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy.”** Not only humans, but everything that God created was made to give him glory and praise. We who live far from the ocean, and who are surrounded by so much noise and light and smart phones, can find it easy to focus on man-made noise and miss the beautiful sounds of nature. The roar of crashing ocean waves, even the sound of a river lapping at rocky banks, can sound like people clapping in applause. Majestic mountain peaks remind us of the amazing power of the Creator. Yes, creation joins us in singing God's praises.

Sing a new song to the Lord; sing with all the people, all the instruments, all the resources of creation. And sing a new song that will go on forever.

There are problems on earth, like pollution and war and sin, yet Scripture says that the creation is waiting to be freed from its slavery to decay. That will happen on Judgment Day. **“Let them sing before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.”**

Jesus rose from the dead on Easter. And he promised that we will rise from the dead, too. When Jesus ascended to heaven, an angel appeared and told his disciples that Jesus would return, visibly, for all people to see, at his Second Coming. This world will be re-made, with no more war or danger or evil. Our bodies will be raised glorified, with no pains or sorrows, no possibility of death. And we will stand before Jesus, the Judge.

“He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.” Yes, on that last day, Jesus will set all things right. He will judge in “equity”—that means, fairness. Those who rejected Jesus, put their trust in their own ability and goodness, will get a fair verdict: guilty of sin, and punishment for it. But those who put their trust in Jesus have already been sentenced: we are forgiven. On the Last Day we will be ushered into eternal glory, living in that perfect new creation, and singing God's praises forever.

We will be singing the new song of salvation. So now, today, we can sing the new song. No more fighting to gain our place. No more misery. No more punishment. We sing a song to the Lord, praising him for saving us. **“Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things.”** Amen.