

A New Song

Midweek Advent 1; Series A

Psalm 96

Good evening. This is the first of our three part midweek Advent sermon series on the theme, “Beautiful Savior, King of Creation.” We will focus on selected creation psalms as we prepare for the celebration of the coming of our Lord on Christmas morning and remember his coming for us now, in the present, as well as his promise to come again. The first psalm we will consider in the three week series is Psalm 96. Especially we reflect on the words of the first verse, “Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth” (vs.1)!

We sing new songs and old songs. Those who are older and probably more mature and wiser than me sing and often speak about old songs. To tell you the truth I have no idea about most of them. These songs come from a *different time and era* that is unknown to me. Even if I do recognize artists and songs, I do not *know* their songs like those who grew up in that time and era *know* the songs. I probably do not have the same level of appreciation for the songs. They are natives and I am just a foreigner.

The same can be said about those of younger generations like me. We sing new songs sung by new artists of whom I am sure many our parent’s and grandparent’s ages are unaware. We come from a *different time and era*. Even if our parents and grandparents recognize artists and songs, they probably do not *know* the songs like we know the songs. They probably do not have the same level of appreciation for the songs. When it comes to new songs it could be said that those of younger generations are the natives and those of older generations are the foreigners. Yet, both new and old songs coexist.

Some of you may be familiar with a website called Pandora.com. It is an internet radio website. You get the opportunity to create your own radio stations that play the music you like. I and many of my friends have used this website for years. I like to create radio stations that play the music I grew up listening to in high school. I also like to create classical music radio stations that play soothing music that I can listen to when reading or writing. I think most people use Pandora radio in a similar way. They seize the nostalgic opportunity. They tap into their childhood and play the “golden oldies” or the classical country songs. Some may listen in the month of December to get in the Christmas spirit and listen to a station that plays Christmas carols. My wife, Talitha, uses Pandora radio in a different way. She uses it as an opportunity to play *old and new songs together*.

On the Pandora radio station that is most often played in our household the old sounds from Johnny Cash, Frank Sinatra, and Ella Fitzgerald can be heard along with the new melodies of Taylor Swift, Maroon Five, and Blake Shelton. It is a complex mix of old and new songs. All the various genres and artists spanning seven or eight decades coexist on this radio station.

The psalmist sings to us this evening about a new song that involves all creation. He says, “Let the heavens be glad, and the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy” (vv.11-12). All of the varied and different parts of creation from all of the varied and different times

and places will join together in singing *one new song*. It will be a song of “blessing” (vs.2), “salvation” (vs.2), “glory” (vs.3), “praise” (vs.4), and “joy” (vs.11). The new song!

The psalmist’s new song serenade begs a question. Why a new song? What was so bad about that old song the creation chorale was crooning? The psalmist clues us in on the problem in at least one of his lyrics. In verse five he says, “For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens” (Vs.5). The problem was that the old song was being sung to a different god! It was not being sung to the God of “strength and beauty” (vs.6). It was not being sung to the one who “made the heavens” (vs.5) and is “greatly to be praised” (vs.4). It was not being sung to the one who is “feared above all gods” (vs.4). The people had no righteous fear, awe, honor, and respect for the one true God, YHWH, the God of Israel, the creator of the heavens and the earth.

So this old song was not a pretty song. Its lyrics did not consist of blessing, salvation, glory, praise, and joy. This is what Sin and disobedience toward the one true God does. It turns order and beauty into disorder, confusion, decay, and ultimately death. In Sin you and I cannot truly rejoice and be glad. In Sin the Sea does not roar in praise (vs.11). In Sin the fields do not exult with exceeding joy (vs.12). Rather, as the Apostle Paul declares, “The whole creation has been groaning together” (Ro 8:22). He can say further, “And not only the creation, but we ourselves . . . groan inwardly” (Ro 8:23). The rhythm, tone, and melody of this old song of Sin and death have a disastrous effect upon all creation, even your body and soul. If all that there is to sing is an old song, then there is a day when, to paraphrase Don Mclean, “The music will die.”

As our psalmist is wrapping up his creation canticle he calls our attention to a time to come. He says, “Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord, *for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth*” (vv.12-13). When does all creation sing this new song? When the Lord comes “to judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness” (vs.13). This is what we remember in the season of Advent—the Lord coming to do his work of righteousness. We remember the coming of our Lord to make creation right with God once again, to bring it “in tune” with its Creator. The Apostle Paul also reminds us that the Gospel, the good news, of Jesus Christ is the righteousness of God revealed (Ro 1:17). When God reveals his righteousness through his faithful Son Jesus Christ it is good news. There is cause for great rejoicing. The very subject matter and content of our new song has come even while all creation is stuck in the same old rhythm and rhyme.

Consider the songs that are sung at the announcement of this faithful, righteous Son of God’s birth. When the Angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she was with child she burst into singing, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior” (Lk 1:46-7). When Zechariah received the news of the birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner of this one who brings a new song he cried, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us” (Lk 1:67-8). When the angels announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night the heavenly host praised God and said, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased” (Lk 2:14). After Simeon was presented with the infant Jesus in the Temple according to the Jewish purification rites, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation” (Lk 2:29-30). This Jesus is the Lord who has come to bring a new song to his creation just as he promised through the psalmist so many years prior. A new song of blessing, salvation, glory, praise, and joy he certainly does bring.

This “new song” is not just for the past or a bygone era. This song is also for you now, today! You have heard the song of his salvation. You have been washed and joined to this new song. Your ears have heard and your mouth has tasted that the Lord is good. The Lord comes and brings with him a new song even in this age where the tune of that old song of temptation, Sin, and death is still felt in your flesh and Spirit struggles. The Lord comes and brings with him a new song even amid the sickness, disaster, death, and decay that happens all around us. He has joined you to the new melodious tune of salvation and restoration of all creation even when the old one keeps clanging along and making noise.

One of the truly amazing things about being faithful to the Christian Church’s historical liturgical tradition here at Atonement is that we actually get an opportunity to join with the whole Church in singing the same songs that they sang. Perhaps you already noticed. That new songs that Mary, Zechariah, the angels, and Simeon sang on that very first Christmas are some of the same canticles that we sing in our liturgy in the Divine Service on Sunday mornings. What a truly amazing and wonderful thing to know that in a very real way we are joining these blessed saints of old in singing to the Lord a new song! We are all part of one holy choir!

And we don’t just sing this new song here on Sunday morning. No, this is the song of salvation. You have been renewed and restored, delivered from that dreadful old song and its disastrous effects. The guilty refrain of that old song of Sin and death is no longer “stuck in your head.” So now we take the lead of the shepherds. After the angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds and announced the birth of Jesus. After the whole heavenly host sang that new song right before the eyes and ears of those shepherds, they went and told the very thing that was made known to them. Good news needs to and wants to be shared. The new song of salvation needs to and wants to be sung. In thought, word, and deed let us be so consumed with the new song of our Lord’s salvation for us that we cannot help but join Mary, Zechariah, the shepherds, the angels, Simeon, and all creation in singing. Amen.