

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 25th Sunday After Pentecost, November 6, 2016

Sing a New Song
Dr. Kenneth Humphreys
November 6, 2016

Psalm 98

The Lectionary for today is unusual in that it includes two readings from Psalms, portions of Psalm 145 which I read at the beginning of the service and Psalm 98 which I have selected as the text for my message today.

Our services include a Psalm virtually every week. Generally the Psalm is read but is not discussed. What are the Psalms? Have you ever thought about that? Why do we read a Psalm week after week?

I could just as well ask why we sing hymns in church. You expect to be singing in church as well you should. Singing hymns expresses our joy to God for all that he has given us. Psalms do the same thing because Psalms are hymns too, generally spoken, but they are songs --- songs of praise to God or, in some cases they are songs of lament.

Often the words of familiar hymns are taken from the Psalms or are paraphrased versions of a Psalm as is the case with our opening hymn this morning, Isaac Watt's very familiar "Joy to the World!"

"Joy to the World! The Lord is come" opened our hymn. Psalm 98 says "*Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.*"

"And heaven and nature sing" says the hymn. The Psalm says, "... *all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music.*"

Many hymns taken from the Psalms are nearly verbatim the words of a Psalm. Notable is the 23rd Psalm, words of which appear in seven different hymns in the Presbyterian Hymnal including the second hymn which we sang this morning.

I could go on but the point is that hymns are Psalms and Psalms are hymns. Psalms are invitations to us to sing.

Our Psalm this morning makes that abundantly clear with its opening line, "*O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things.*"

In the Psalm, the singer is rejoicing over the salvation given us by God. That is indeed something to sing about.

The devotional booklet These Days (May 8, 2015) talking about Psalm 98 commented: *“Given the prevalence of bad news, joyful hymns may seem out of place. How dare we be cheerful when nearby children missed meals today, disease claimed new victims, and many women endured daily abuse? Heaven forbid we should cover up these realities with loud clanging cymbals of denial.*

“The psalmist isn’t in denial. He calls for rejoicing not to drown out suffering but to transcend it. Destructive forces are at work. But God’s triumph is sure. God will set things right and give all people what they truly need. [That is] reason enough for us and the whole creation to clasp hands and sing praises.”

Our Psalm calls for a new song of praise to the Lord for his salvation; a celebration with harps, trumpets, and the shofar; and the earth to join in praise for God. It concludes with the reminder that at the end it is only God who will be the judge of the people.

James L. Mays ⁽¹⁾ tells us, *“The early Christians changed the psalm as a hymn about the Christ to express their joy at having found a king who brought salvation instead of oppression and misery. When Isaac Watts transformed Psalm 98 into a hymn for Christmas, he was tutored by Scripture and tradition --- and he got it right. ‘Joy to the World!’ as a hymn reflects and renews what the psalm has always meant ... It catches and repeats the exuberance of humankind and nature in recognition of ... something that changes history for nations. It maintains the connection between salvation and rule: ‘The Savior reigns.’”*

Leslie Brant ⁽²⁾ has rewritten the Psalms as poetry. Her version of Psalm 98 is:

*Men have proclaimed God's praises
throughout the ages.
Now it is our turn to worship the Lord
and to announce God's presence
and His loving concern
for the inhabitants of this world.
His power is as great today as it ever was.*

*He continues to reign over His universe
and the creatures that move in this world.*

He alone is the true God.

He offers to all men His salvation.

*He is close to His sons and servants
and fills the hearts of His children with joy.*

Now, as His sons and servants,

let us express this joy.

*With voice and musical instruments,
with lovely melodies and joyful sounds,*

let us proclaim the glory of God.

Let us fill our homes and sanctuaries,

our halls of learning,

our factories and marketplaces,

even the streets of our city,

with sounds of celebration.

God is here; God is now!

God is indeed here as he has been throughout the ages. God is then and God is now.

Shortly we will be celebrating the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. As you partake of the meal that our Lord has prepared for us, remember that God is here; God is now! Sing a new song!

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

(1) James L. Mays, [Psalms](#), John Knox Press, Louisville, 1994

(2) Leslie F. Brandt, [Psalms / Now](#), Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1973

Note: Scripture quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible, 2011