

Psalm 98

Praise the Judge of the World

¹ O sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done marvelous things.
His right hand and his holy arm
have gotten him victory.

² The LORD has made known his victory;
he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.

³ He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness
to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen
the victory of our God.

⁴ Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

⁵ Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody.

⁶ With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD.

⁷ Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
the world and those who live in it.

⁸ Let the floods clap their hands;
let the hills sing together for joy

⁹ at the presence of the LORD, for he is coming
to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with equity.

- ⁴ Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.
- ⁵ Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody.
- ⁶ With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord.

Reading this felt really weird, almost inappropriate, considering that for the past few months we have been specifically told not to sing or make too strong joyous noises, to put it in the words of the psalm. No choirs, no trumpets, no horns, nothing of that description is allowed right now, if not performed under very strict conditions.

I remember more than one occasion when someone would say that performing a service without singing doesn't feel the same, doesn't feel right. As if something important was missing. As if we couldn't live up to certain expectations right now.

Made me wonder. Why does it feel that way? Why do we sing in worship? And why is it so important to us?

We sing in the name of the Lord, sure. But WHY do we SING?

I for one don't even enjoy singing that much. But I do enjoy listening to people singing, which makes Peace Church a pretty good place to be.

That gave me an idea. We sing in the name of the Lord because we think that God might like it just as much as we do, judging by our own experience. And this, our very own experience, is all we have to come to that conclusion.

The psalm that we just heard, telling us to 'sing praises to the Lord' wasn't written by the Lord himself, but by human beings just like us, in the name of the Lord. Which means that it is not a direct statement by God. So there is no way for us to know if God even likes music. And if he does, we still don't know if we hit the right spot by singing gospels and hymns. For what we know God might just as well prefer Smooth Jazz, Heavy Metal, Experimental Techno or complete silence.

We perform in the name of the Lord what we consider valuable and worth sharing. And for most of us music is pretty high up on that list so it makes sense to include it in a service.

As I said I feel no way to be sure about Gods opinion about music. But I feel pretty sure that, whatever we enjoy, God enjoys. If I think about myself there isn't much that I enjoy more than listening to someone talking about a topic he or she is genuinely excited about. And if we were really made in Gods image, I believe the same counts for him.

But that also means that music is not the only way to show our respect, our excitement. We can share whatever we think is worth sharing and it will be good.

There's all kinds of cultures in this world with all kinds of different traditions. Every tradition has it's own ways to honour it's Gods or important people. And some of those traditions may seem strange or alienating to us. But they are still an honour to witness, participate in or even receive. And again, I have no reason to believe that the same doesn't apply for God.

I know not being able to sing right now is sad because singing and listening to people singing is such a beautiful thing to do. And I'm not trying to say that you mustn't feel that way. But maybe the thought that we can worship in other ways and not having to worry about not meeting expectations helps a little on the way.

We can play music, light candles, share our joys and concerns, include each other, just as we have been doing until today. And there's still creativity in us to find new ways, as we keep proving to ourselves.

Let's keep proving to ourselves. Let's keep finding joyful ways to celebrate even, or especially during these times of waiver and waiting. Let us stay excited and show that excitement. Let us make God and the people around us happy by doing so.

We can share, we can laugh, we can pray. And so far nothing could stop us from doing that and nothing will.

Amen