

“Let Heaven and Nature Sing”

Psalm 96

Today is known as Gaudete Sunday. This comes from the Latin translation of Philippians, which calls us to “Rejoice in the Lord!” Today is the Sunday of Joy. It is a Sunday of celebration as we remember and embrace our call as people of faith to rejoice in our God always. That’s why Psalm 96 is such a perfect text for today. It is a hymn of celebration. It captures our anticipation at the approach of the Lord. All of creation is signing! This is nature’s Doxology, giving thanks to the Creator for all that God has done.

Wait, didn’t you notice that? Sure, humans are mentioned some but in comparison to the rest of the text, Creation is front and center. This doxology, this expression of thanks and praise comes from all the voices in Creation as it receives the good news that its Creator is coming, that its Creator will restore it to the original beauty of the Garden. All Creation is singing as it waits for its Creator to come and bring justice to all the Earth. From the heavens, to the seas, to the countryside, even the trees shout with joy because all creation knows the Lord is coming and in doing, will bring about a new day of healing and wholeness, not just for the people of God but for all of God’s creation as well. This nature doxology

affirms that a new situation exists in our world. It invites all of heaven and nature to sing as it prepares to receive its King.

Creation's hymn of praise recognizes and calls to our attention that "because God rules the world, it is not sufficient for us humans to think only humans gather to worship God. It is awfully arrogant of us humans to ever form congregation that includes less than the whole earth to praise our God. All are invited in, all the people, all the nations, all the heavens, all the earth, is invited to gather and form a congregation which represents the full diversity of God's creation." Psalm 96 is a call for all the earth to sing.

It is a new song for all to sing. It is new to us not because the psalmist added new words to an old tune. It is a new song because it breaks a pattern. It breaks a pattern which we humans set into motion long ago, a pattern which shapes our decisions, our communities, even our economies, a pattern which gives us permission to see the world as a gift only given to humans, a pattern which gives us permission to think and act like humans are the center of the universe. This new song breaks a pattern because it celebrates and acknowledges that the destiny of humanity is inseparable from the destiny of the earth.

Let me say that again...this is a new song because it celebrates and acknowledges that the destiny and well-being of humanity is inseparable from the

destiny and well-being of the earth. The psalmist invites us as humans to sing a new song, a song celebrates our call as humans to be partners with all the world, with the oceans, with the trees, with the soil, with the very air we breathe, we are invited to be partners with all of Creation as we lift our voices in thanksgiving to our God, giving praise to our Creator, our Redeemer and Sustainer.

However, if we are being honest with ourselves, the song Creation is singing now is more like a funeral dirge than a celebration of its Creator. Species loss, toxic pollution, oil spills, fracking on protected lands, contaminated water ways, smog, wild fires, 500 year storms now happening almost every year. The song of creation is filled with sorrow rather than celebrating its Creator. And it is all because of us, because we humans demand to be front and center, because we as stewards of God's Creation, have ignored our connection with and to all the Earth, and in doing so, we have disrupted the natural cycles which sustain our world.

Yes, I know how depressing all this is, especially on a day when we are supposed to be celebrating joy, awaiting the coming of our King. I will also admit that it would be so easy for us to give up and to give in, offering up the excuse that we can't change the world, that there is nothing we can do to stop the damage already done, that it would be better if we would just give up hope and not care anymore.

Except that is not what we are called to do. In Genesis 2, God creates man, Adam from the very earth, Adamah in Hebrew. The very basis of humankind is our connection with the Earth. We are made up of the very elements which sustain life. The very atoms which created the universe have found their way into everything, from the celestial stars to yes, even our very human forms. From stardust we are made, and to stardust we shall return. We are connected intimately to God's creation.

The very knowledge of this fills our hearts with joy, because the God who crafted this amazing vast universe formed our inward parts in our mother's wombs. Everything we have experienced in our lives confirms this. This knowledge is almost too wonderful for us. This life giving understanding has led us to know deep within our hearts, has led us to hold onto the knowledge that even now, we are and continue always to encounter our God as a living reality in this world. God is with us. Emmanuel, actively working, actively bringing about healing and wholeness not only for God's people, but for all of God's creation as well.

This is something the world does not understand. Something the world cannot comprehend because it has nothing to do with power and might. This is our new song, and it is a song of hope, a song of peace, a song of joy. So what I am inviting us all to do, instead of listening to the chorus of this world, a chorus which tells us to give up hope, a chorus that only sings of destruction and disruption of

God's creation, instead I am inviting us all to listen and yes, more importantly, to sing a new song... a song which reminds us, which proclaims always that our God will have the last word. I am inviting us to sing a new song which empowers us to face the injustices and brokenness of our world. I am inviting us to sing a new song, to sing with all of Creation, knowing that this new song defies reality. Because...this new song tells us of a baby born in a stall, a baby who would be King. This new song tells us of a man hanging in pain on the cross. This new song tells us of life and love for all of God's people after the stone was rolled away.

This is a new song, a new song which we are called to sing always as we rejoice in our God. This is a new song, a song which tells this world that light and love will always overcome.

May we never forget this as we join creation today and all days, as we join creation in waiting, hoping, praying, singing of the day when God will come and establish justice on this earth, not only for the people of God, but for all of God's creation as well. Amen.