

September 6, 2020

**“Sing to God a New Song”  
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake**

*Scripture Readings:*

**Psalm 149:1-5**

*Praise God!*

*Sing to God*

*a new song,*

*sing God's praise*

*in the assembly*

*of the faithful.*

*Let Israel be glad*

*in its Maker;*

*let the children of Zion*

*rejoice in their Ruler.*

*Let them praise God's name*

*with dancing,*

*making melody to God*

*with tambourine and lyre.*

*For God takes pleasure*

*in the people;*

*God adorns the humble*

*with victory.*

*Let the faithful exult*

*in glory;*

*let them sing for joy*

*on their couches.*

**Romans 13:8-14**

*Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.*

*Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*

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The Psalmist has a challenge for us this morning. “Sing to God a new song!” Not that we are not singing in the faithful assembly right now but if we were this sounds harmless enough, easy enough.

If you think of it literally it just means learn a new song. But when I read this earlier in the week what it brought to mind was my Mom’s voice. When someone became predictable in their irresponsibility or made promises that they had no intention of keeping, whether it be a politician, or a relative, or her children when we promised to do our chores and didn’t. She would say “same old song and dance”.

We humans seem to be stuck in a place in our evolution. The kingdom of God seems to be stuck in its’ becoming, in this “same old song and dance”.

If you remember anything from your history books you know that what is going on around us is nothing new.

Plagues are not new, violence isn’t new, discrimination is nothing new, people needing to feel superior to others is nothing new, men coming to power by stoking fear and racial tension is nothing new. It is the same old song and dance.

But the Psalmist says that God desires from us a new song. That’s a tough order when you think of it that way. To break out of the old and try something new.

When I am literally learning a new song I approach them all the same way, “Ugh, I don’t know if I can do this”.

Then I work at it chord by chord, note by note, very awkwardly at first but the more I practice the smoother it gets, the more muscle memory I get in my playing, the more I quit thinking about how to play it and start feeling the song, experiencing it and understanding what the writer was trying to communicate.

Learning new ways of interacting with the world is a lot like that, it isn’t easy, we approach it with apprehension, we are very awkward at first but the more we practice it the easier it becomes. The more it becomes a part of our very being and the more we come to appreciate it and enjoy the benefits.

In the second reading in Romans this morning, Paul, always the practical Paul, seems to have a passion for showing us how we are supposed to put Jesus’s words and deeds into action.

He sums up what being a follower of Christ means “to love one another”. Echoing Jesus when he said, “this above all things, to love one another as I have loved you”.

Paul takes it a step further though, knowing that humans need the details, the ways to practically apply concepts into the real world. Just a few decades after Jesus's death Paul knew that as simple as "love one another" is, people just weren't getting it. And here we are two thousand years later and people are still not getting it. Same old song and dance.

Paul sums up the ten commandments, again like Jesus did, that they simply mean that love does not wrong a neighbor. He is not talking your property adjacent neighbor. He is addressing a diverse community of Romans.

He is talking about loving all others. In Christian ethics this passage combines with others to develop the concept of the "Law of Love". How we are supposed to live as Christians is by the law of love.

We have tried for centuries to complicate Christianity, making up rule after rule for just about everything. Growing up Southern Baptist, we weren't supposed to dance even though it says right here in the Psalm "Let them praise God's name with dancing."

In two millennia we have made thousands of rules up, pulled them out of thin air over and over again around baptism-- How old? Dunk or sprinkle? Around communion-- Is it Jesus or a symbol?

All these rules while not being absolutely committed to this one thing. To love. To do the things that Jesus was actually explicit about, loving our neighbor, not judging one another, taking care of our children, our poor, feeding the hungry, loving our enemies, turning the other cheek, you know the list.

Now don't get me wrong, Paul did his own making up of rules out of thin air, "cover your heads ladies" and silly things like that in order for Christians to fit in and not be martyred but again, he gets it right here.

He isn't talking about love as an emotion or something sentimental he is talking about it as a way of being, a way of life, the very stance you take when you get up in the morning and meet the world.

Paul gives us a powerful image to think of. He says Wake up! "Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light". Turning a symbol of war on its head and making it a symbol of love. "Suit up in your armor of light". Armor is a form of protection. Love is our solution and love is our protection, and our salvation.

I have always found the idea that Jesus died for our sins like a sacrificial lamb mandated by God as theologically problematic. But understanding Jesus as my savior. I get that completely. Especially right now as we slowly move through this dark time in our collective history, I see how Love is the only thing that is going to save us all.

There is a catch though. Susan Eastman, a professor at Duke wrote, “The parallel between putting on the armor of light and putting on the Lord Jesus Christ tells us that to live out our baptism is inevitably to be in conflict with the status quo”.

I think until we start practicing love in absolutely everything we do as people, as societies, as countries we are a doomed race. The logical consequence of the path we are on is one of assured destruction of our planet, and the logical consequence of oppression, of fueling racial divides, history has shown that as well. It always, always ends in violence or war or worse, genocide.

I’m not being dramatic and I’m not being negative, I am just being realistic. These are predictable patterns in human history and though we are capable of incredible things and have made so many wonderful advances, right now it just feels like the same old song and dance.

Rev. Dr. King wrote in a sermon on loving our enemies. “We must discover the power of love, the redemptive power of love. And when we discover that we will be able to make of this old world, a *NEW* world. We will be able to make humanity better. Love is the only way.”

By our faith we commit to be in this for the long game. Not just now but throughout our lives. What will protect us, what will save us as people, as a community, a nation and in the world is love.

So every morning I want you to get up and put on your armor of light and cloth yourself in the love Jesus showed us. Clothed in that love and light we will not just protect ourselves from the toxicity of this world but we will overcome it.

I’d like to close with a quote from Henri Nouwen. “In a world so torn apart by rivalry, anger, and hatred, we have the privileged calling to be living signs of a love that can bridge all divisions and heal all wounds.” AMEN

