Easter 6

May 9, 2021

Psalm 98

 There was an Italian restaurant I used to like. They had a salmon ravioli dish that was my favorite. It had a tomato basil cream sauce that paired nicely with the pasta.

 We moved away, and on our first trip back, we had the chance to go there for lunch. For weeks, I looked forward to that pasta.

 But when we arrived, I discovered that the sauce had been changed.

 I got something else. I just knew it wouldn’t be as good as I remembered, because part of what I liked was the sauce.

Thinking back on it, I know that there’s a good chance that the dish wasn’t as good as I remember it being. But the nostalgia of the dish, the memories attached to it, the comfort of something familiar, made it better.

 That’s the thing about change, about new things. It’s sometimes hard to imagine how a new thing can be better than the old. We have memories associated with the old things, and if those memories are good, then we’re often reluctant to accept a new version. But it also keeps us from trying the new thing, which we might just like better.

 I’ve been thinking about this as we have conversations about how we’re going to resume “normal” activities here at church. The experience of living through the last 14 months has changed us. We *can’t* go back to to how things were, because we aren’t the same people as we were all those months ago.

 Besides, God didn’t create us to always be the same, to never change, to never grow in how we understand God or our world around us. We are works in progress and what we will be is not who we are now.[[1]](#footnote-1)

 Which means we have to learn, as the psalmist says, to sing a new song, because God is doing something new. Not just in each of us, not just in the church, but in all of creation.

 One of my favorite passages in the Bible is Isaiah 43. It begins with one of the numerous reminders to not be afraid: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

 After the Lord speaks about how he has cared for the people of Israel, he says, “Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”[[3]](#footnote-3)

 God’s not talking about changing the sauce on a pasta dish here, and he’s not telling the people to forget their history, either.

When the people hear these words, they’re being offered hope that their time in exile is coming to an end and reminded of how God had provided for them in the past.

God was doing a new thing for them, calling them into a new way of being. They’re invited to notice it, to pay attention.

Our Psalm for today could easily accompany these words from Isaiah, encouraging the people to give praise to God for delivering them from exile and leading them back to Jerusalem.

But maybe it was hard for some people who were born in exile to imagine how a life someplace else could be good. They had to be reminded of what God had already done for the people and find a way to trust in the promise that God was doing a new thing that was even better.

 So the words of the psalmist would have encouraged them to remember God’s faithfulness and steadfast love.

Our Psalm for today could just as easily accompany the story of the Exodus. The people were being saved, delivered out of slavery, out of Egypt. God was doing something new for them, promising them a place to live that would be their own.

 When they arrived at Mt. Sinai and God gave Moses the Law, and the people set about learning how to live in community on their own, it was time to sing another new song. God was calling them into a new way of being.

But the people struggled. Learning to sing a new song was not easy. They doubted God, wondered if God had abandoned them as they wandered through the wilderness, not knowing where their next meal would come from or if they’d find a good source of water. Some of them even wondered if they would have been better off staying in Egypt.

It was hard to trust that the new thing God was doing was a good thing.

 Today, however, our Psalm accompanies the story of the early church.

Throughout the season of Easter, we celebrate that God’s promise of salvation is offered not just to a few but to *all* people. The promise that God will restore all creation, make it the way that God intended for it to be, includes *us*. We, who are works in progress, who are not yet what we will be, are invited to sing a new song, to praise the God who has called us by name and claimed us.

 We hear in the readings from Acts about how the early church coped with how God was working a new thing through the followers of Jesus.

 It wasn’t easy.

 They had to figure out how to be followers of a person who had been very publicly executed by Rome. How to declare with confidence that Christ had been raised from the dead and trust in that good news.

 And they had to learn how to welcome the Gentiles into the fold as the church grew beyond Jerusalem. They had to learn how to welcome people who looked different, spoke different languages, ate different foods.

 God was calling them into a new way of being. It wasn’t easy, but the people learned how to live into Jesus’ instructions to go out into the world and baptize people and share the good news with all nations,[[4]](#footnote-4) and trust that God would bless their work.

God is calling *us* into a new way of being, too.

Each of us, the church, and all of creation.

 God is inviting us to sing a new song.

 Maybe it’s hard for us to imagine what it is. Maybe it’s hard to let go of the former things.

 But weknow that God is always doing something new, always working to bring God’s plans for creation to fullness.

As the body of Christ—bound together by our faith and God’s love and guided by the Holy Spirit—we’re invited into that work. We’re invited to place our trust in the God who promises to deliver salvation and redemption for all of creation.

And we are invited to sing a new song, for God has done marvelous things.

1. 1 John 3:2 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Isaiah 43:1b [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Isaiah 43:18-19 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Matthew 28:19-20 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)