



Jan. 15, 2017
Epiphany 2
Psalm 40: 1-11

Singing our Song

40 years ago the rock band **U2** started in Dublin, Ireland. Many of their songs had almost a subversive Christian message. The leader Bono, was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, students of divinity unpacked his theology and put together an alternative Holy Communion service set to U2 music. Bono used his status to communicate with heads of state to help the poorest of the poor.

One of his songs was entitled simply “40” ... written in the 1980s, and paraphrased the 40th psalm. When they sang it in a concert, the refrain hit a chord with the audience. As the band left the stage one by one, the crowd continued the song’s refrain: “I will sing, sing a new song.” The fans were still singing the chorus as they poured into the night streets: the chorus:

***I will sing, sing a new song.
I will sing, sing a new song.***

***How long to sing this song.
How long to sing this song.***



Songs are powerful transmitters of the human experience. Do you remember the first song you ever learned to sing? What were the iconic songs of your growing up? What songs have stayed with you through the years?

And every once in a while we hear ***a new song***.. and it resonates:
Yes! That’s what I believe!

That expresses who I am.

That tune and that melody... they work!

Here, in this psalm 40, we hear the depths of the human/faith experience:

***I was patient while I waited for the Lord.
He turned to me and heard my cry for help.
I was sliding down into the pit of death, and he pulled me out.
He brought me up out of the mud and dirt.***

He set my feet on a rock. He gave me a firm place to stand on.

³ He gave me a new song to sing.

Calling out to God from the lowest of our low places..
And feeling heard, and rescued from an awful place..
But not just that...getting a new footing... AND a new song.
Songs **remind us** of what's important
Songs take us back to a life event.
We sing songs we believe,
even when we can't believe them
in the moment.

That's why ***hymns of faith*** .. are so important to us..
When we ask "what hymn is your favorite?"..
We'll get so many different choices.
Some of us may say... "oh yes.. that's a good hymn"..
While others say.. "Yuck, I can't stand that song!"

For some of us, hymns that talk about Jesus' blood are so very meaningful..
For others, we like the loving Jesus songs...
And others need the justice songs...

A new song

has to do with where God has met us in our lives.
It may have been on a mountain top...
Or a valley...
Both are important.



This is the cycle of faith..

The author of this psalm is reminding himself of how God has acted in the past...
how when everything was at its worst, God was there.
It's like he is shoring up his spiritual memory,
because in the second half of the psalm, he is down in the depths again!

We always go back to the fact that God was faithful in the past
... and will yet be faithful
There will be newness again.

Where are you right now?

Are you feeling like you are "bogged" down.. in a muddy pit?
There is a lot going on in our world right now..
in our personal lives..
and being "rescued" from the pit is not always a quick thing...
sometimes it's years.. decades.

That's why the SONG is so important...
It reminds us how God has acted in the past..
and what we can hope for the future.

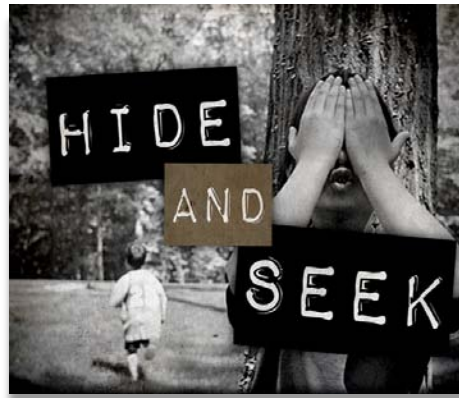
We read the psalms.. and they are **not** our personal experience...
but they resonate .. we know whoever wrote it
lived through something very real
very personal..
and as bad as it got...
God WAS there for the author....
God can be here for us too.

The theme of this Epiphany Season
is **Hide n Seek w/ God..**

or
God Where are You Hiding?

Especially in our culture of "right now"
we expect if this God is real
that this God will show up
when **we** call...

But that God becomes more of a Bellhop,
or Santa Claus, or sugar daddy.



Is that the God of the Bible?
Is that the God of this psalm?

*I waited passionately for God
God heard my cry for help.
I was sliding deeper and deeper and God pulled me out.
out of the mud and dirt and onto a rock.. a solid place to find my footing.
He set my feet on a rock. He gave me a firm place to stand on.
and gave me a new song to sing.*

If we are looking for a Mr. Fix-It God,
we won't see the God who walks with us
in the Valley of the Shadow of Death?

If we are looking for a God to take **our** side
we will miss the God
who loves ultimately and eternally?

If we are looking for a God to reinforce **our** world view
we will not understand the new place
God wants to bring us to
and the NEW SONG that will begin
the NEW STORY
of who we are.

What is our Song
In these dark days
When so much feels wrong,
and not what he had hoped for or where we thought we'd be?

The powerful thing about the biblical stories
is that they are STORIES
to be told often and repeatedly
because they DO remind us
of how God has acted faithfully
to many types of people
in many different circumstances.

And our FAITH is
that God **will** act again...
because that is God's nature.

Many of us know that in the Jewish Passover narrative
a young child is to ask the question:
Why is this night different from all the rest?
And that leads into the telling of the story of the deliverance from Egypt.

But did you know we do the very same thing each time we celebrate Holy Communion?
I always have folks who say: Why does it have to be so long? Can't we just get to the part where
Jesus blesses the wine and bread?

But just as in the **Passover Meal** where they recount how faithful God was in delivering
them... In our **Great Thanksgiving** we recount
WHO and HOW God has been to God's people
WHO Jesus was...

Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again....

So that... we can REMEMBER in our dark times.. our questioning times..
And trust that SONG..While we wait.
How long to sing this song?

This church through some very dark days and yet always it has been brought through to the other side. Most of us would rather forget that pain ... not remember the Story..

And yet the Story makes us who we are
And the Story reminds us of who God is
And how God acts.

During the Holocaust, a child wrote these words on the wall of a concentration camp cell:

*I believe in the sun
Even when it isn't shining.
I believe in love even when
I do not feel it.*

*I believe in God even when
He is silent.*

United Methodist musician **Mark Miller** set these words without any other embellishment of words..to a haunting Israeli tune. He teaches groups of hundreds of people at a time, on the spot to sing this in three parts.. and it is absolutely stunning, and soul-stirring.

These simple words of a child
became the NEW SONG
to remind generations to come ...
to remind us
that God IS
Even when we do not feel/see/ or perceive God.

What is our song?

Sometimes our most powerful witness
is how we get through life...
through the difficulties...
how we put one foot in front of another.

Today and tomorrow we honor
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Do you know that his favorite hymn was
Precious Lord, Take My Hand?

It is a song that was written by a man
named **Thomas Dorsey**, in 1932.

He had just found out his wife
had died in childbirth with her, their baby.



In his grief, Mr. Dorsey sat down at the piano and riffed off
an old Sunday School hymn:

Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone...

adding his own words:

**Precious Lord, Take My Hand
Lead me on, let me stand,
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.
Through the storm, through the night,
Lead me on to the light
Take my hand precious Lord, Lead me home**

That SONG was Dr. King's song.

It expressed at once his despair
and his faith.

It was sung at the rally in Memphis the night before
Dr. King was assassinated.

***When the darkness appears and the night draws near
And the day is past and gone***

At the river I stand

Guide my feet, hold my hand

Take my hand precious Lord, lead me home

It was his song!

The one that lifted him up
out of the depths

with the faith and courage

to face what lay ahead.



Amen

Preached by the Rev. Pamela Nelson-Munson at Eugene's First United Methodist Church.