

Sing a New Song

May 14, 2021 Scott Gunn

*Sing to the Lord a new song, **
for he has done marvelous things. — Psalm 98:1

When I was a parish priest, certain complaints from parishioners used to make me chuckle. I always wanted to laugh when someone complained about an unfamiliar hymn. The Bible very specifically tells us to sing new songs, so maybe we should get on board with learning some new tunes?

Of course, the psalmist was talking about more than songs. We are meant to notice the marvelous deeds that God has done for us and to celebrate them. In fact, all creation joins in our praise.

*Let the sea make a noise and all that is in it, **
the lands and those who dwell therein.
*Let the rivers clap their hands, **
and let the hills ring out with joy before the Lord,
when he comes to judge the earth. — Psalm 98:8-9

The scriptures are imbued with a palpable awareness of God's deeds past, present, and future. Imagine if we could cultivate the same keen sense of God's work in our world. We wouldn't celebrate what God had done in the past merely as a sentimental memory but as a promise of future deeds. Because we have seen God act, we know that God can act in the future. And if we can see these things, we can see God at work now, in our lives. We can see ourselves in the great story of God's saving purposes for us.

When I talk with people in churches, it's not uncommon to encounter a kind of despair. Our churches seem to be shrinking, and it's not clear how we will make them healthy. It's tempting to think the health of the church depends on our actions. But what if we could be freed of that burden? Good news, saving the church isn't up to us! Jesus is the only savior, and he has already promised us that even the gates of hell cannot prevail against the church.

If we could get out of the way, we might discover that God will do wondrous things in the church, in the world, and in our lives. Singing a new song, literally, might help us. By singing songs about the mighty deeds of God, we'll be reminding ourselves that God can do mighty deeds in the present and in the future. And by singing new songs, we are preparing ourselves for the reality that God's mighty needs might not prop up the familiar status quo. We might have to get used to new things!

Next time you encounter a new hymn or an unfamiliar worship song, think of it as a small step into an exciting world in which God does marvelous things for all to see.