

Sermons at Union Congregational Church

Preached by The Reverend Gail L. Miller, Pastor

May 21, 2017

Sixth Sunday of Easter
Music Appreciation Sunday

Psalm 66

The Song We Have To Sing

Orel Hershiser was a pitcher for the Los Angeles Dodgers from 1983-2000. After the final game of the 1988 World Series against the Oakland A's, Bob Costas of NBC interviewed him in the locker room, and asked what Hershiser was doing between innings when the cameras had caught him in the dugout with his head back, "eyes closed, almost meditating."

"I was singing to myself to relax and keep my adrenalin down, because every time I thought about being ahead, I got too excited to pitch," he said.

The next night he was a guest on *The Tonight Show*. Johnny Carson also asked about that. "Do you just hum, or what?"

"I sing." The audience clapped and cheered. He hadn't meant *that!* "I'm not gonna sing!" And the audience roared.

"Oh, yes you are!" Carson said. Orel shook his head, panicking. He'd never sung alone in public in his life. "This could be a first," Johnny pressed him. "Just a couple of bars."

"Well, here's the one I remember singing the most:" (Suddenly it was deathly silent.) "As I sat on the bench I'd sing:

*Praise God from whom all blessing flow
Praise Him all creatures here below
Praise Him all of ye heavenly host
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost."*

The question we should ask ourselves is not whether we can sing... but whether we have a song to sing. Because when we love Jesus... our voices (no matter what WE may think of them) are the finest musical instruments known to Heaven.

I have a pastor friend who seems to have the glow of the Holy Spirit with her all the time. Her faith is steady and sure even when life throws the worst her way (and I've known her long enough to have seen that happen). Well, Susan LOVES worship, and she LOVES to sing! The thing is, she can't carry a tune in a bucket! She's an awful singer! And she's an inspiring singer - because she knows that the song is more important than the singer.

And the song for today is

The Lord brings us through the tough times!

And in Psalm 66 we're given an image / metaphor. It's from the smelting process used to tease precious metal out of rocky ore. Molten ore like silver or pewter is heated to high temperatures to burn off the detritus and gunk. The impurities rise to the top and form an icky film that has to be skimmed off in order to use the pure metal. In Psalm 66, we see that instead of physical heat, God used the conquering power of Babylon to test and refine God's people the Israelites.

And the lesson to take from this is that no matter how bad things might seem, God is helping us to become the best we can be. The tests that we face - especially the hardest ones - deepen our faith and dependence on God.

God is good even when times are bad!

And, we are told, the response to God's faithfulness and providing for us and bringing us through - is worship. But the worship of Psalm 66 is a bit different than what we are doing here I think.

Because of what God has already done for us, we are to do more than just give thanks; this is an all in and best of the best offering to God. This is falling down and crying out because God has brought us through and lifted us up and saved our @\$*\$s.

It is worship as testimony about God, about who God is and what God has done for His people. And we don't need to have our own high drama / life saving moments to fall down in gratitude or to lift our hands in praise. Psalm 66 guy didn't - or if he did he didn't mention it. No, he was singing about what had happened hundreds of years in the past.

But here's the difference I think - between the way we approach worship and the worship of the Psalm 66 guy.

I think we hear the Bible stories, and to us they are far off stories about another people in another time and another place - not ours. They are interesting history, and perhaps quaint and primitive in their depiction of the world.

But here's the thing - they're not that. They are **our** family stories. Some of you may have done research into your ancestry.... I love hearing people talk about their discoveries - "I've got royal blood!" or "I found some shady characters - maybe that explains old Uncle Al..." or "We're descended from pirates!"

Well how about this for an ancestry:

"You know, our family was kept in slavery for 215 years,
and then this guy who was like a spy in the king's court,
but had an open channel to God somehow,
kept pressing the king, while God kept bringing tragedies,
until finally the King set them free,
but STILL the king went after them
and they were running and running through the desert being chased,
when they came to a sea and they thought they were goners,
but again God made dry land for them
and they made it through to the other side just in time
to see their assailants flailing around in the waters
which had closed in behind them.

AND THEN they lived for another 40 years as nomads -
again with God providing everything they needed
even as they got all seduced by other gods
and complained about their situations...."

And you know what? THAT God, THAT God is doing a lot more than getting you a good parking spot at the mall....

He's calming your worried heart as you sit bedside in the hospital room

He's giving you good listening ears in the job interview

He's helping you break up with your boyfriend/girlfriend because they are NOT the relationship He wants you in

He's providing that surprise check for just the amount that you need at just the right time

He's reconnecting you with that old friend out of the blue, not because you need them, but because they need you...

God is good even when times are bad.

John and Elaine Beekman were missionaries who worked among the Chol Indians of southern Mexico. They were a remote tribe - so remote that they had to ride mules and travel by dugout canoes to reach them. They were there for 25 years with other missionaries to translate the New Testament into the language of the Chol Indians.

Today the Chol Church is thriving. More than 12,000 Christians make up the Chol Christian community, which is self-supporting now.

What's interesting is that when the missionaries got there, the Chol Indians didn't know how to sing. With the coming of the gospel, however, the believers in the tribe became known as "the singers". "They love to sing now," the Beekman's commented, "because they have something to sing about." (*Psalms of the Heart*, George Sweeting)

The question this morning is not whether you can sing...
but whether you have a song to sing.

And we do - we do....

Amen.