

PSALM 96

¹ O sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.

² Sing to the LORD, bless God's name;
tell of God's salvation from day to day.

³ Declare God's glory among the nations,
the Holy One's marvellous works among all the peoples.

⁴ For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;
God is to be revered above all gods.

⁵ For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.

⁶ Honour and majesty are before the Lord;
strength and beauty are in God's sanctuary.

⁷ Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

⁸ Ascribe to the LORD the glory due God's name;
bring an offering, and come into God's courts.

⁹ Worship the LORD in holy splendour;
tremble before the Holy One, all the earth.

¹⁰ Say among the nations, 'The LORD is sovereign!
The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.
God will judge the peoples with equity.'

¹¹ Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;

¹² let the field exult, and everything in it.
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy

¹³ before the LORD who is coming,
for God is coming to judge the earth.
The Mighty One will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with truth.

Have there been times in your life when you've needed to be energized, times when you've needed to be awakened, renewed, resurrected? Psalm 96 is the kind of psalm made for such energization. It is a song, a "new song" created to be sung enthusiastically. Clearly, it is composed for public worship, with an orchestra of instruments, drums, cymbals and voices. It's all about exuberant praise.

But why a new song? What's so new about this song? Well, the song is a call for the people to come together in a whole new way. It's a call for the renewal of relationships not only of the people with each other, and not only with God, but with the whole of creation.

There are a bunch of action words by which the people are called. They are called to: sing, bless, tell, declare... ascribe, bring, worship, even tremble! But when reference is made to the rest of creation – the trees, the sea, the fields, the earth and the heavens, the action words are more invitational (“let...”). Invitation is respectful, reverential and a recognition that creation must choose to join the song with humans. Creation is already in communion with the God who energizes it into life and new life in an ongoing way. It is us humans who need to be re-integrated into communion. We’re the ones who have been alienated, isolated, antagonistic and hence, we have turned “dominion” (Genesis 1) before God into domination of creation to the planet’s peril. We’ve invented false images and idols of God as a dominating and controlling monarch as well. A new song will require a new image of God as much as a new relationship with God’s creation.

And it is in anticipation and hope of this new relationship with God and all that is, that the Psalm moves: God is coming to judge the earth and its peoples with righteousness and truth. “God will judge the peoples with equity.” All of creation welcomes this, but do we humans? For those marginalized and victimized by predatory human practices, God’s righteousness (which is justice) coming to be evokes hope. All will be held accountable. The world will be set right. Creation will begin healing again. But for those who may feel less enthused about a reordering of the order of things and for those feeling threatened by greater accountability, perhaps this new song is a wake up call.

As far as the future of our planet goes, time is running out. Will future generations curse our complacency and resistance to changing our lifestyles more dramatically than we seem prepared to do? Do we just keep voting in governments who privilege the economy and low taxes without a sense of the vast investment we need to make to eliminate our dependence on fossil fuels, the way everything we buy is packaged, the way we travel and our lack of public restrictions on creating pollution or cutting down our forests? We need to sing a new song, and we need to sing it loud so that those in power begin to hear it. Perhaps Psalm 96 may inspire us. What do you think?

PRAYER: We want to sing a new song, O God. But we need inspiration to do so. We need conviction to do so. We need faith and hope that singing a new song can make a difference beginning in our own lives, priorities, passions and concerns... Meet us where we are, O God, and take us where we have yet to go. Find us in our own struggles and help reorder what we need to do and how we need to live... Give us some greater peace, peace that our commitment to truth and righteousness may bless us in ways we have yet to discover... In Jesus’ name; Amen.