

## PSALM 98

<sup>1</sup> O sing to the LORD a new song,  
for the Mighty One has done marvellous things.  
God's right hand and holy arm  
have gained the victory.

<sup>3</sup> God has remembered God's steadfast love and faithfulness  
to the house of Israel.  
All the ends of the earth have seen  
the victory of our Mighty One.

<sup>4</sup> Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;  
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

<sup>5</sup> Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,  
with the lyre and the sound of melody.

<sup>6</sup> With trumpets and the sound of the horn  
make a joyful noise before the One who reigns, the LORD.

<sup>7</sup> Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;  
the world and those who live in it.

<sup>8</sup> Let the floods clap their hands;  
let the hills sing together for joy

<sup>9</sup> at the presence of the LORD, for the Holy One is coming  
to judge the earth.  
God will judge the world with righteousness,  
and the peoples with equity.

One of my favourite hymns, which we often sing as a hymn of praise is entitled: "Sing a new song unto the Lord". It is #422 in our Hymn Book. It is also a paraphrase of Psalm 98. Just like Psalm 96 (and there are others), this psalm also calls on the people to sing a 'new' song. Why a new song? Are the old songs not good enough? For the people of Israel, songs or psalms are often composed for particular occasions. Even as they are sung again and again on different occasions, many songs are first composed to address a particular situation or moment in the life of the people. It may be after particular losses where a song may help in the grieving process. It may address feelings of guilt or shame or the bitterness of loss. Other occasions have to do with celebration and thanksgiving after deliverance or victory. Sometimes there is also a call not only for the vindication of God's people, but vengeance toward their enemies too.

This psalm clearly has victory and deliverance in its sights and therefore calls on the people to "make a joyful noise to the Lord... break forth into joyous song and praises." What it doesn't do is gloat over defeat of enemies or express gratification at the suffering of those who have committed harm against the nation and its people. Rather, there is

beautifully descriptive imagery that communicates exuberant joy. The second paragraph is all about expressing joy with music and various musical instruments: lyre (stringed instrument), trumpet and horn, as well as voice.

But what is even more astonishing is the call for all of creation to join in the singing, celebrating and noise making. The sounds and “noises” of nature are imagined as musical praise. From the roar of flood waters, the thunder in the sky to the various sounds on hills and mountains... rather than being threatening, nature is also part of the celebration. The image painted for us in this song is of all creation coming together as one in order to celebrate the victory of “God’s steadfast love and faithfulness.” And even as this is focussed on the nation of Israel, the imagery evokes a broader thrust toward unity and friendship, freedom from fear and trust in the goodness of life all around.

In a world of violence, guns, weather extremes and various threats from people and from disease, being given a vision of a world where one feels totally surrounded and totally safe, at one with all life around... is a beautiful vision. And even though such a vision can feel so dissonant in comparison to the real world many of us know and live, opening our hearts to singing a song of praise with exuberant joy can actually liberate and empower us in the face of fear and distress. It’s not just lament songs we need for our journey through trouble. There are times where we need to be lifted out of our trouble, to be given a break from them. Psalm 98 gives us a therapeutic jolt of positivity in our souls if we give ourselves over to it. Grab an instrument, maybe a pot or pan and a ladle, clap your hands, turn up the music and sing your heart out. How does that make you feel (so long as the neighbours don’t call the police 😊)?

As humans, we are made for joy. Praise is as important to our souls as is the capacity to shed tears. Fear can be a healthy capacity to help keep us safe, but we also need to grow some faith, hope and love in a greater whole some of us name: “God.” God’s faithfulness and steadfast love are all around us. Music, song and psalm can help us “feel” it, despite everything else we may also be facing and fearing. Will you make some joyful noise before the Lord?

**PRAYER:** We need joy in our lives, O God... real joy. Not just the momentary thrill that comes from a purchase or a win or a social media ‘like.’ No. We need the kind of joy that arises when we feel a fresh thrust of assurance that we are infinitely loved and eternally held no matter the mediocrity and imperfection we see in ourselves and the despair and frustration we can feel in relation to the people and circumstances around us. You see infinite beauty in us as the artistic creations we are. Even as we are fragile and our life fleeting, even as we can go up and down in our emotions, even as mistrust and distress

can invade our thoughts and our sleep... your love toward us is steadfast and faithful... Do not abandon us. Keep trying to enter in. Help us feel some joy again... In Jesus' name; Amen.