

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Sermon Text – Psalm 98

Theme: *“Thank the Lord, for he has done marvellous things”*

Grace, peace and mercy to you from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Sometimes we can easily overlook the obvious as we set about our daily journey of life. Even as we come to church services where we use language that says we *celebrate* the Lord’s Supper, one might be forgiven for thinking all is doom and gloom. The psalm set for this week is Psalm 98 and it is a timely reminder that we are to be *thankful* and the reason is that God has won salvation for us. The Lord has done marvellous things and so we are called to sing a new song. Let’s hear this wonderful psalm of thanksgiving.

Psalm 98

Oh sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvellous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. This Lord has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Make a Joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises! Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody! With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord! Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it! Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the people with equity.

Heavenly Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

The Lord has done marvellous things

As we read God’s Holy Word, both Old and New Testaments we read it through Christian eyes who know the story of Christ dying on the cross to save us from our sins. And so it is when we read the psalms so it impossible to read a psalm like 98 without seeing the person of Jesus Christ fulfilling the Scriptures. “Oh sing to the Lord a new song for he has done marvellous things!” The thing which is significant is that most of these psalms were written about 1,500 years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Whilst we can’t be sure who is the author of this psalm, the first thing of note is the joyful note of thanksgiving because the Lord’s “right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.” This implies there was a problem which required some saving work to be done. The history of Israel is a story of continuous struggle against the Lord because of the sinful nature of humanity. Not even God’s own people, the Israelites were blameless in the eyes of God. They were constantly bickering amongst themselves from the time they were led out of Egyptian slavery. They complained about a lack of food, water, shelter and the danger from other nations. When they were settled in the Promised Land, they complained that other nations had kings and they didn’t. We hear this cycle of trying to do things by their power, but then realising that as God’s people, they need to keep turning back to him for real power and salvation.

So once more God has come to the rescue of his people and the writer of this psalm urges the Israelites to sing a new song. But we are people of the New Testament. What does it mean for us? Well God’s Word says we are the New Israel, the new people of God and like the ancient Israelites, we are quick to complain to God when things don’t go the way expect they should. We grumble when our church isn’t doing the things we think it should, or when our culture seems to be heading off the rails, or when our personal lives seem to be spinning out of control. We might try really hard to sort things out for ourselves but sooner or later we come to the realisation we need a saviour to stand in our place.

Like the psalmist we celebrate that the Lord has worked his salvation. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection we are freed from our sinfulness. The sting of death has been defeated and for this reason we can celebrate.

All of creation rejoices

The joy of God's salvation doesn't finish with God's people though. His saving work isn't done in private or within the confines of the 'holy huddle' of those who trust in him. All the nations, all people get to see his saving work. The question is whether they believe this salvation is won for them also.

But remember that since sin came into the world, all of creation suffers so now the writer cries out for all the earth to make a joyful noise to the Lord. We are quick to think of God's creation either as being passive or that Jesus' salvation was won for humanity alone. Now certainly people are the only creatures created in God's image. We alone are created for relationship with God, but this doesn't mean God didn't create everything else so why shouldn't all creation cry out with joy for the salvation he has won.

For those who have discovered the joy of CS Lewis' Narnian Chronicles, you may remember the story of Prince Caspian where once more Aslan and those who are faithful to him defeat the evil forces in the world of Narnia. This allegory for Christian living then describes the victory dance as the Narnians celebrate the defeat of evil. All of Narnia joins in the celebrations including the animals, the people, the trees, even the river throws off the restraint of bridges as they joyfully acknowledge the reign of Aslan as the true ruler of his created world.

I've referred back to the Narnia Chronicles on a number of occasions now and there is biblical reason for this. We sometimes read God's Word in a very flat and dull fashion. The language can seem hard to understand and it doesn't seem to make much sense. But if you can imagine the scene that is being described, God's Word comes alive and it becomes much easier to see the wonder of what God has done for his people and all the world.

Whenever we *stop* for just a little bit and watch the world in all its glory, how often do we get a sense of wonder for what God has created? Don't we see the sea dancing? Can you see the mountains straining to the sky, reaching up to the heavens? The beauty of the Ulysses butterfly dances with the breath of life. Surely this is but a portion of the joy that Psalm 98 brings to us today.

Praise the Lord – tell everyone

As we praise the Lord, as we dance to his victory, its not just an idle celebration. We dance forward to the time when the Lord will judge the world with his righteousness. The Lord won salvation for his sake and we receive his benefits. The psalm closes with the Lord judging the peoples with righteousness. We might have thought the psalmist would have written, 'the Lord will judge *his* people' but instead he includes all people.

So this means our dance and song is a witness to all people that we put our trust in the Lord and the salvation he has won *for all people*. We want to share this good news so others will put their trust in the saving work of Jesus and join us in this celebration of life.

Perhaps this is the story that is lived out in our first reading for today, Acts 10. The Holy Spirit fell on all who had gathered and who heard the Word of God proclaimed. The Jews were amazed because they realised the Lord had done marvellous things and his salvation was revealed for all people. Imagine the feast of celebration as all those who were gathered by God joined in the blessing of being baptized in His name.

Life is difficult today. There are many challenges to deal with and at times it can seem as though God has left us to our own devices. He hasn't. Turn back to God and ask him to forgive your sins as you put your trust in the marvellous things he has done. Join in the new song and dance of celebration, together with all creation.

And the may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.