

Break Forth into Singing

Christmas Day

Pastor Josh Frazee

Isaiah 52:7-10

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord all the earth! Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!”

These words actually come to us from the ninety-sixth Psalm. This psalm was written and used by David when he would bring the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem in victory. The Septuagint, that is, the Old Testament translated into Greek, also tells us that this psalm was used when the temple at Jerusalem was rebuilt following the Babylonian Captivity (The Lutheran Study Bible commentary notes, p.940).

Both of those events are fulfillment of God’s Word, His Promises to the people of faith in the Old Testament. God had promised to provide victory for the Israelites against the other nations, and each time David would return with the ark of the covenant, it was another reminder that God had presently fulfilled His promise. In the same way, when the people of Israel were freed and permitted to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple, it was according to God’s promises prophesied in Isaiah.

These are each events for which the people of God could rejoice. But while a few non-Israelites would find joy in these events—namely among them Rahab and Ruth—this psalm proclaims that all people should rejoice in God’s marvelous works among humanity.

Today we and all of humanity can do as the psalm exhorts us: singing a new song of praise to God. We do this because God has acted in a new way—one which has an effect on and for all people of the earth everywhere for all of time. God has become flesh in His Son Jesus Christ, the very Messiah promised to come.

To better understand how this has effect for us today, though, we can go back to the promises God made in the Old Testament, especially in our Old Testament text from Isaiah 52.

Verse 1

Isaiah wrote the verses of our text speaking of the deliverance which would come as a result of King Cyrus’ decree—as a fulfillment of God’s promise. And so the words: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation.”

Just going that far, some of you may recognize these words from the graduation of pastors and deacons from the Seminaries. Others of you might recognize them, but as from the New Testament instead of the Old. It is true that Paul uses them in his letter to the Romans, but it is also true that he quoted them from here in Isaiah.

Again, the Scriptures point to how God is the same testament to testament and how He is the one who delivers us from covenant to covenant. Humanity in Isaiah’s time was no better off than us today. They were sinners. They deserved nothing more than God’s condemnation. And as sometimes bad things happen to those who believe today, the Israelites were taken over by the Babylonians. But God, as always, promised deliverance. He promised a salvation who would come through a Messiah.

The words of our text, the same ones quoted by Paul, are written concerning the fulfillment of that promise. God raised up King Cyrus and the Israelites were set free. After many years of slavery to the Babylonians, the Israelites could do nothing more than break forth into singing. God had done what He had said; they were free again. And so the words “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings

good news of happiness, who publishes salvation.” It was not that the messenger was so good, but that the message itself was so beautiful!

That’s how Paul was able to quote the same words in reference to pastors of this new age. The news of which pastors and deacons are messengers is so beautiful that even the feet of those bearing it are pronounced beautiful because of its beauty! What is this news? What could make us break forth into singing as the Israelites did at their release? Salvation—only for us, and indeed for all of humanity, it is not salvation from slavery to another nation, but salvation from the sins to which we find ourselves slaves.

Verse 2

As in Isaiah’s day, people today, even us believers, do not live as God commands. We do not keep Him first; and we do not love one another as ourselves. Just look at the last several weeks.

This has been the least amount of snow we’ve seen since I’ve been pastor here. Yet our attendance at the MidWeek Advent services has been what seems to be the lowest since I’ve been here. And this is the first year we’ve had to cancel Christmas caroling. There is something to be said for being ill or not healed enough to go out singing even in dry weather, but what about the rest of you? Have you been keeping God first in your lives this winter, this Advent season?

What about loving your neighbors? Have you been putting the needs of your friends and family above your own? Children of the congregation, have you put the desires of your mom and dad above your own, honoring them as your parents? Have you honored your guardians? Parents, have you been putting the needs of your children first, or have you been overbearing, driving your children to exasperation, as Scripture describes as sin?

Have you been more concerned in giving this Advent season than receiving? Paul quotes Jesus as saying that “‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” You see, that phrase is much more than just a current idiom that comes and goes in popularity, it is a way of living. Have you been living it, or have you been more concerned with what you want?

And these are just actions. Scripture tells us that ultimately, our very beings are totally corrupted by sin. We cannot save ourselves; you cannot save yourself. You need a deliverer, you need a Savior. The Gospel news is that God has not only promised but also fulfilled the promise to send you a Savior. Just as He sent King Cyrus to release the Israelites from their captivity, He sent His only-begotten Son to be born of the Virgin Mary. Today we celebrate the remembrance of His birth. But that is not just a historical fact, it is applied to you today in this very service. You have heard the Absolution God has spoken on you on behalf of His Son’s death and resurrection. Many of you have been baptized into faith in Jesus. And many of you will taste and drink God’s forgiveness in the Sacrament you will receive from this altar. You receive the good things from Jesus’ coming—not just in accounts handed down over time, but here and now, today!

Verse 3

Today that good news of the Gospel continues to go out—a Gospel of a deliverance so much greater than from an earthly ruler. A Gospel of your sin being forgiven today. All of it has been paid for by that child born in the manger whose birth we celebrate this morning. Therefore “(t)he voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice; together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the Lord to Zion” And for the same reason we can all “(b)reak forth into singing...for the Lord has comforted his people; he has redeemed

Jerusalem. The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”

While all the earth could only celebrate from afar as God rescued His people Israel in the Old Testament, His New Testament salvation in the Christ Child from the manger was and is for all people everywhere. He has redeemed not only Jerusalem but the entire world from their sins. He has bared His holy arm before the eyes of all the nations and the ends of the earth are seeing the salvation of our God in that babe from the manger, Jesus Christ, as the Word continues to go out by pastor, deacon, and every other Christian alike.

So, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, continue to sing. “Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord all the earth! Sing to the Lord; bless his name, tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!” Merry Christmas! In Jesus’ Name. Amen.