

## **PSALM 98**

O sing to the Lord a new song for he has have done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory. The Lord has made known his victory; he has revealed his vindication 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 victory of our God.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sign praises. Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of the horns make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord.

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sign together for joy at the presence of the Lord, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and the people with equity.

## **JOHN 15:12-17**

This my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer because the servant does not know what the

master is doing. But I have called you friends because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

### **ACTS 10:44-48**

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

## **FEARLESS LOVE**

**Psalm 98**  
**John 15:12-17**  
**Acts 10:44-48**

The centerpiece of our faith is love. Jesus went to the Cross out of his love for all humanity. God created the universe out of love and gave ultimate expression to it in the sacrifice of his Chosen Messenger. Clearly God wanted us to learn from Jesus what it is to live together in harmony and to be in communion with the Creator Him/Herself. Has the lesson been learned at all? Of course, it has been and it can be witnessed in the sacrifices multitudes have made for the good of both the creation itself and of our earthly companions. Love is the bridge that Crosses over (pun intended) the oh so many issues that separate us. And then a container ship collides with its piling and it collapses blocking our passage to the other side and must be rebuilt over much time.

Isn't that a metaphor for where we are in our human relationships right now? And what does the container ship symbolize? I believe it is fear. While love is indeed the subject of song and poetry and sermons meaning we are all desiring love to be at the core of our lives, fear often seems to be the stronger force with more than enough power to bring down any bridge. It's scary! I am afraid that it is behind the polarization of our

society. Of course it is! And social media is probably propelling that container ship more than anything else. Its contents are strewn with hatred and disinformation all of which are designed to make its readers fearful of a potpourri of issues—your choice. Our upcoming election may well be decided by those who are most skillful in churning up our fear.

But our scriptures don't support fear as a motivation. Psalm 98 is a song of joy and praise for our earthly habitat which God created for all living creatures. *Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises...With trumpets and the sound of the horns make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord.* There is no fear in this! There is only gratitude and unity. It is the *sea, the world and those who live in it.* It inclusive of everyone and everything. There is an implicit understanding that behind the creation is love. It is the engine that drives it and the energy that holds it together.

Indeed, but let us be clear about that which we speak. Because it is the glue of the universe itself, love cannot cease to exist. It is inseparable and synonymous with Divine Presence. Wherever God is, there must be love which means that every living being is an expression of God's love. We dare not forget this as we live together with 25 billion other people and trillions of plants and animals. We cannot place limits on our love if we

wish to live in the wholeness of the Divine Presence. It is what Jesus is talking about in our familiar passage from John: *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.* You see, by its nature, love is sacrificial. It goes beyond the intimacy, connection, and compatibility with which we normally associate it. It is a much greater force than that. *I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.*

You cannot fall out of this love. It doesn't stop at the artificial boundaries we have created at the doorsteps of others. You see a powerful recognition of this in our third lesson for this morning. *While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles...* They were shocked, yes **shocked!** that that boundary they believed existed between Us and Them had been obliterated, yes **obliterated**, by Divine Presence.

And that circles us back to fear. I believe we are mostly unconscious about the large role fear plays in our decision making and actions. As an exercise in self-awareness, become more conscious of how often you

verbalize either to yourself or others statements that begin with, “I am afraid that...” Our daily conversations are littered with them and they are the grist of our cultural wars. Nearly every political ad you will hear from now until the election will be designed to manipulate you by fueling your fear. Which ones are you buying into? Which ones disgust you? Answer those questions for yourself and then reflect upon the application of our scripture lessons for this morning upon the issues being addressed.

It is difficult in this climate of hatred and distrust we are living in to rise above the negative messaging bombarding us. Where we must begin is with the joy and gratitude of living on Planet Earth: *Make a joyful noise to the Lord all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises!* God’s love is inclusive, even for you and even for me who have come up short in our efforts *to love one another as Jesus has loved us.* And as to our relationships to others, remember the words Peter spoke to the new followers of Jesus: *Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have been received the Holy Spirit just as we have?* God’s love is fearless. Is ours?

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