

March 18, 2007  
Lent 4

*"Lord, Put a Song in My Heart"*

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### **ISAIAH 12:1-6**

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*In that day you will say: "I will praise you, O LORD. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me. <sup>2</sup> Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation." <sup>3</sup> With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. <sup>4</sup> In that day you will say: "Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted. <sup>5</sup> Sing to the LORD, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world. <sup>6</sup> Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you."*

"Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things!" That's why we come together for worship week after week. We want to see with fresh eyes the glorious things our Lord has done for us, point them out to each other in worship, and sing about them with passion and joy. When disaster strikes our land and its people as happened after 9-11, our leaders gathered together in worship and sang hymns to the Lord in their distress, such as "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" and "How Firm a Foundation You Saints of the Lord." When crisis comes into our lives, it is the lines of hymns that have a way of comforting us as only music can with words that lift us up to the Lord.

Did you ever have the experience of being alone and feeling a little blue. Then you heard this bird in your back yard singing such a beautiful song? It almost seemed to suggest to you that it did not have a care in the world because a heavenly Father was taking care of it? I often prayed to myself this little prayer, "Lord, put a song in my heart." We want to use this as our theme for the sermon today based on these words from Isaiah about singing to the Lord because he has done glorious things for us.

#### **Let me sing your song of salvation to myself**

A popular reggae song begins with the lyrics: "Here's a little song I wrote, You might want to sing it note by note, don't worry be happy." It is one thing to encourage someone to be happy, but quite another to give them a solid, real, genuine, eternal reason for being happy and bursting into singing. Isaiah the prophet gives us such a reason when he writes, "In that day you will say: I will praise you O Lord, Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me." Ah, be happy. Rejoice. Sing. God's anger against has been turned away.

It is hard to be happy and sing when you know that someone is angry at you for something bad that you have done. This morning we think of that son we heard about in the reading of the gospel. He left home. He squandered his inheritance in wild living. He tried to keep from starving to death by feeding pigs and eating the food they ate. He could not be happy as long as he was away from home, away from the love his father had for him, and under his wrath and anger. His only hope was to come home, admit that he had made a mess

of his life, and then hope that the father might allow him to come back as a lowly servant and live in the servants' quarters.

That's me! That's you! How many times have we disappointed our heavenly Father by lives that are lived contrary to the way he wants us to live? In Isaiah 59 the Lord told his people, "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you." We sing about how unworthy we are of God's love in some of our hymns such as the hymn by Luther, "Fast bound in Satan's chains I lay; Death brooded darkly o'er me. Sin was my torment night and day; In sin my mother bore me. Yet deep and deeper still I fell; Life had become a living hell, So firmly sin possessed me." It doesn't do any good to gloss over sin by saying, "Don't worry. Be happy." That does not solve the problem that will hide me from my Father's face forever.

I cannot come home on my own hoping that I can find enough good things to do to make up for the bad. My only hope is that the Father, my heavenly Father, will find a way to forgive. That is what he did for me and for you in Jesus his Son. Jesus "became sin for us that we might be the righteousness of God in him." That's the message that makes us want to sing for joy. God put his anger for our sin on Jesus and it was turned away from us.

It is not just the old hymns that convey the message of salvation clearly. A few weeks ago our choir sang a popular contemporary Christian song with these words, "How deep the Father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure that he should give his only Son to make a wretch his treasure. How great the pain of searing loss. The Father turns his face away as wounds which mar the Chosen One bring many sons to glory. How high, how wide, how deep the Father's love for us." Next week, God enabling, we will sing an old Puritan song that has put into a contemporary music format with these words, "Before the throne of God above I have a strong and perfect plea. A great high Priest whose Name is Love Who ever lives and pleads for me. My name is graven on His hands, My name is written on His heart. I know that while in Heaven He stands No tongue can bid me thence depart."

I am holding a piece of chalk in my hand, a large piece of chalk that can be used to write on a sidewalk or parking lot. You can take this piece of chalk, draw a circle around yourself, and then ask the all-important question, "Within this circle, within this place, within this moment and time in my life, do I have something worth singing about?" Isaiah has the answer, "Although you were angry with me, your anger has been turned away and you have comforted me."

Notice the reason for singing is amplified even more. "Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord is my strength and my song, he has become my salvation." The greatest song that has ever been written for the Christian faith with the most powerful lyrics and music has not yet been sung. It is waiting to be sung someday around the throne of the Lamb. Even if you were not that good at singing here on this earth, that will change. "They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice; 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.'" "Salvation belongs to God." "Surely God is my salvation: I will not trust and not be afraid. The Lord is my strength and my song, he has become my salvation." That's the song that we can sing as we wait for the Lord return. It has nothing to do with me and my performance or my feelings and my emotions. It has everything to do with Christ paying the ransom price for me and my God bringing me to believe this.

Did you hear about the man who fell overboard on a cruise ship this past week? Apparently after having too much to drink he ran through an open patio door and plunged to the water below. Eight hours later the Coast Guard retrieved him from the water. He did his part by staying afloat for 8 hours and the Coast Guard did their part. When it comes to salvation it is our God and the Lamb who is our salvation. How long would that man have survived if he had a 100 pound lead weight on his ankles? That was our condition weighted down by sin. "When I was sinking down, sinking down, Christ laid aside his crown for my soul, for my soul." "To God and to the Lamb, I will sing, I sing, Who is the great I am, While millions join the theme, I will sing."

Ah, but how will I keep this song in my heart? How will I keep from singing the sad song that says, "Nobody likes me, everybody hates me, guess I'll have to go and eat worms." Listen to Isaiah, "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." The Hebrew word for "wells" is actually the word for flowing water or springs. The ancients had cisterns or underground storage that gather rainwater. This water easily became foul smelling and putrid from debris and dirt. They also drank from dug wells that were dug where the water table was high enough to allow water to seep into the well. The best water was the spring water that flowed into some of the wells, always cool and fresh. That's the word used here for the wells of salvation.

We have these wells of salvation with us as we travel through life. We have God's Word with us, the water of life to refresh us. We have the Holy Sacrament that gives us Jesus body and blood. If we look for comfort and peace in ourselves or what the world offers us, we will be reaching into cisterns that have stale water and we may even become sick from not drinking the right water, the water of God's Word. It is important to drink water daily up to 8 glasses a day we are told to keep the bodily functioning properly. It has been said that some people spend most of their days chronically dehydrated because they do not drink enough water. It is even more important to be in the Word. Even if you only spend a few minutes each day in the Word, think of how it can refresh you. Some of you are already there. To others I plead with you to drink daily from the Word. A whole new world waits for you as you drink deeply from the wells of salvation on a daily basis.

A woman named Leona had just lost her husband. I was driving down the street on a hot morning in Tucson and notice her walking by herself. I pulled over and asked how she was doing. She said she was doing fine. The she showed me something she was holding in her hand. It was her booklet of Meditations that she was reading as she walked. She said, I read a little bit, think about it and then pray. She was digging deeply into the waters of the Word and they were sustaining her at an important time of life. The Lord had definitely put a song in her heart that she was singing to herself that day.

### **Let me sing your song of salvation to the whole world**

Do we want only to sing to ourselves? No, we want to sing to each other, and to anyone who will listen. "In that day you will say: 'Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known among the nations what he has done.'" We want the whole world to hear the songs of salvation that we are singing. "Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world." Instead of singing quietly we are encouraged, "Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you."

God's ancient people were known all over the world for their singing that took place when they gathered in Jerusalem. When they were captives in Babylon they lost their heart to sing the great songs of salvation, especially Psalm 118 that they always loved to sing that began with the words, "O give thanks unto the Lord..." In Psalm 137 it says, "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion...Our tormentors demanded songs of joy: they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." They tried and they could not.

How different it was for the Apostle Paul and his coworker Silas after they were badly beaten, and then thrown into the deepest part of the prison. From within the foul smelling, vermin infested dungeon, with the danger of infection and death looming up large it say in Acts 16, "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God and the other prisoners were listening." Hear those sounds, the beautiful songs of salvation, rising up from the inner walls of the prison. When the earthquake comes, and the prisoners are freed, the jailor wants to know, "What must I do to be saved?" It was the songs the Lord had put in their heart and on their lips that led this man to ask for help. Lord put a song in my heart, every day of my life. Amen.