

Psalm 98 – Ordinary 33C  
Apostles Anglican  
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*O Lord Who has made known Your salvation among the peoples, by revealing Your righteousness in the sight of all nations, open our eyes to the abundance of Your mercies by the Light of Your Holy Spirit, that as we are lifted up by the knowledge of Your salvation, we may be comforted by the revelation of Your righteousness and bear witness to Your love with a new song of joy and praise. Through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.*

In the early 1980s, the theologians Daniel Hardy and David Ford raised the question, “What is the biggest or most fundamental problem facing the Church today?”<sup>1</sup> Think about that question for a moment, “What is the biggest or most fundamental problem facing the Church today?”

In Daniel Hardy and David Ford’s seminal *Jubilate: Theology in Praise* (1984), the authors ask a teasing question: what is the biggest or most fundamental problem facing the Church today? The biggest problem facing the Church is, apparently, ‘coping with the overwhelming abundance of God...’.

In light of our current cultural conflicts, we might be tempted to answer, “We must rediscover our calling to be a praying church for the nation and the world.”

We could say, “Justice. We’ve turned a blind eye to the injustices in our nation and in the world and have been captivated to false desires for power instead of service.”

Or we might be tempted to answer, “Truth. We have turned our back on the Word of God and must rediscover the riches of God’s truth and life as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.”

We might compile quite a list that details the problems of our church and the reasons why our culture is so divided and so turned away from God.

How did Hardy and Ford answer the question? “What is the biggest or most fundamental problem facing the Church today?” They suggested, “The biggest problem facing the Church is ... ‘coping with the overwhelming abundance of God...’

Now let that sit with you for a moment: coping with the overwhelming abundance of God. They redirected our attention from our own weakness to the generosity of God, the hospitality of God,

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from “Psalm 144” as found in *Reflections on the Psalms* by Steven Croft, Paula Gooder, Christopher Cocksworth, Malcolm Guite, John Pritchard, Peter Graystone (2015-05-30). (Kindle Locations 4676-4678). Church House Publishing. Kindle Edition. The text referred to a book *Jubilate: Theology of Praise* (1984). I was not able to locate the original reference, but I located an updated edition with new title: *Living in Praise: Worshipping and Knowing God* (Baker Academic, 2005). In this edition, they write, “How can thinking and living go on in recognition of the abundance of God? How can God be allowed to be God in practice? Coping with God and God’s generosity is the central task of Christian faith, and what is given stretches all capacities. God is more than sufficient for all situations, but is so in particular ways which invite recognition and response” (p 90).

the unspeakable love of God, the overwhelming abundance of God.

For you see, Justice not rooted in the God's abundant love is often reduced to utilitarianism or even the violent will to power of the Zealots. Prayer without beholding the love of God can easily devolve into the lifeless, rituals of the Sadducees. Truth study outside of God's love can quickly become the harsh, legalism of the Pharisees.

The revealing of God's surprising abundance transforms for us. Scripture tells the story of a God who turns deserts in gardens, who turns sorrows into joys, who breathes life into dry bones. And yet, it also tells the story of a people so often blind to the overwhelming abundance of God. So blind that they cry out to return to slavery in Egypt. So blind that they turn to false gods and false power and false systems for hope. Again and again, the Word of God bursts forth like a mighty wind, like the Spirit hovering over the waters of the deep, breathing new life and blowing away the dust of death.

Today's Psalm breaks into our lives with a call,

*Oh sing to the LORD a new song,  
for he has done marvelous things!  
His right hand and his holy arm  
have worked salvation for him. (vs 1, ESV)*

Sing a new song. This new song erupts as a response to marvelous things He has done. I love this word marvelous. It is a marvel. It is a wonder. It is greater than human understanding or power. It is the impossible made possible by the hand of God. It is the hand of God rescuing the slaves of Israel from Egypt. Marvelous! What is the response to such an act of redeeming love? Israel sings a new song. When the children of Israel cross through the Red Sea, Moses and the people join together in one voice,

*I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;  
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. (Exodus 15:1, ESV)*

A new song fills their lips with joy.

When the barren woman Hannah suddenly gives birth to Samuel, she sings a new song,

*My heart exults in the LORD;  
my horn is exalted in the LORD. (1 Samuel 2:1, ESV)*

Or when Elizabeth greets the Virgin Mary and confirms the wonder of God in her womb, Mary sings out,

*My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.  
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;*

*for he who is mighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name. (Luke 1:46-49, ESV)*

All through Scripture and all through history, the response of God's people to the overwhelming abundance of God is to sing a new song, to rejoice and be exceedingly glad. The Psalmist continues,

*The LORD has made known his salvation;  
he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. (Psalm 98:2, ESV)*

The hidden hand of God that sustains every living thing has been revealed in the full light of day. The lamp is no longer hidden under a bushel but lifted up for all the world to see. The light is shining out from the people who were not a people, the people who had been forsaken, judged and found wanting, sent into exile, forgotten, condemned and abandoned. But wait, God didn't abandon His unfaithful people. He didn't forsake them. He called them Beloved. He lifted them up in the sight of Babylon and all the nations and brought them home. He remembered. The Psalmist continues,

*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. (Psalm 98: 3, ESV)*

He remembered. Though weeping may endure for the night, joy comes in the morning! He remembered His covenant of love. He didn't always forsake. He didn't not give them what they deserved but extended His lovingkindness, His mercy. His own arm has brought salvation to them.

When the sins of humanity were so great that they covered the earth, God sent a flood, a deluge. This flood is beyond a big storm. It is the picture of all things coming undone. The world being unmade. It is a picture of the end result of sin and evil, the undoing of all things. The flood is simply the culmination of unbridled evil: the destruction of all things. And yet, God remembers His good creation. God remembers Noah. He enters into the middle of human chaos and descent with a new story, a new family that will start again. He gives Noah a sign, a remembrance of the covenant, of His lasting promise to never destroy the world again through flood.

*"I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease." (Genesis 8:21-22, ESV).*

*"And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.*

*(Genesis 9:12-14, ESV).*

We miss the full import of this promise if we fail to realize that God is telling Noah that if and when the evil of humanity threatens creation again, God will step into the destruction Himself and His own arm will work salvation. This is the hint of a future promise that will be articulated to Abraham, unveiled in the children of Israel, and finally revealed to the nations in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God remembers His covenant of love and will not forsake His creation. In spite of their sin and unfaithfulness, He bears the judgment, the end result of their evil ways with the hand of redeeming love and He reveals this love for all the world to see. Jesus says,

*“When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.” (John 12:32)*

When we proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ, we are proclaiming the Good News of God’s overwhelming abundance. He remembers! And in spite of His people turning away from Him and turning toward the darkness, He remembers and He redeems.

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. (Romans 10:10, ESV)

This is Good News of Great Joy! This song of joy echoes into a dark and broken world. It subverts the power systems on the right and the left because it finds hope beyond our striving for power in the depths of God’s unshakeable love.

This is not a simplistic optimism but a faith that follows Christ to the cross for the joy set before us. The kingdom of God is “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 14:17)

*And the “children of God shine out as lights in the world, in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation.” (Philippians 2:15)*

As the lights in the darkness, the people of God are called to,

*Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;  
break forth into joyous song and sing praises! (Psalm 98:4, ESV)*

If the Psalmist can make a joyful noise with a just a glimpse of God’s overwhelming love, how much more we, who have beheld in fullness the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. This is such good news that the only response is noise: joyful noise! The groans of the prisoner and the groans of all creation under the weight of sin have now become a joyful noise. An inarticulate explosion of delight! Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice! For God has remembered His people in their low estate and has not forsaken them. The inarticulate laughter and shouts become a joyous song, a new song that echoes throughout the world.

Instruments join in the praise song: trumpets and guitars and drums and loud clanging symbols and more. It is a dance that begins in the heart of the redeemed and shakes out into all creation. Now the sea is roaring in delight and all the sea creatures respond in like manner. The rivers are

clapping. The hills are singing.

All creation is swept up in a joyous, raucous response to the God who remembers and redeems, to the overwhelming abundance of God, the love that surrounds us, goes before us and behind us and above us and below us. Our Psalm ends with the coming of the Judge. The Lamb who was slain for the sins of the world comes to right the wrongs, comes with healing in His wings. And all will behold this coming King and kneel down, acknowledging that He is perfectly good and just and loving and kind. For every knee will bow and tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord.

We hear this Psalm today in light of the current struggles in our nation: the division, the animosity, the mistrust, the confusion, the lack of clarity for the days ahead. We come as the priests of God, bearing our pain and the pain of the culture. We come on behalf of world in need of healing. We carry the fear and division and anger and brokenness of our country. We hear His Gospel afresh with hearts longing to behold the overwhelming abundance of God's love afresh. We come to bathe in refreshing streams of His healing and to feel the breath of His Spirit in our souls, to be made new. We come to behold the marvels of our God whose will restore justice and truth and peace and grace to all creation.

As we behold Him, we enter into a new rhythm, a new song of joy that is greater than all songs of oppression and hate and division. We carry this new song of joy that we take out from this place and share it with the nations, with the people on the street and in the store and in our workplaces and in our families and even in our online communities.

We go out with His love and healing and peace and grace for a world in desperate need of Good News of Great Joy!

- <sup>2</sup> *The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
on them has light shone.*
- <sup>3</sup> *You have multiplied the nation;  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.*
- <sup>4</sup> *For the yoke of his burden,  
and the staff for his shoulder,  
the rod of his oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.*
- <sup>5</sup> *For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult  
and every garment rolled in blood  
will be burned as fuel for the fire.*
- <sup>6</sup> *For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,*

*and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

<sup>7</sup> *Of the increase of his government and of peace  
there will be no end,  
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time forth and forevermore.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. (Isaiah 9:2-7)*