

Luke 1:39-55, Zephaniah 3:14-20, Philippians 4:4-7

My spirit rejoices in God my savior. Rejoice in the Lord, always—again, I say, rejoice. God will exult over you with loud singing. Sing aloud, O daughter, Zion, rejoice and exult with all your heart. Maybe you noticed a theme in our scriptures today, in our worship today: Rejoicing and Singing. Our scriptures describe people rejoicing in the Lord, and doing it in song, they describe God singing, and exhort us to rejoice and sing, as well.

And we, of course, do that every Sunday, but we've especially been doing it today, on our "singing Sunday". In our songs and singing, we have been rejoicing, which is appropriate for this, our Joy Sunday, of Advent.

Over the centuries, Christians have so valued singing as an expression of joy, as a way of rejoicing in God our Savior, that we have many songs about singing: "I Love to Tell the Story" concludes "And when in scenes of glory I sing the new, new song/'twill be the old, old story that I have loved so long". O For A thousand tongues to sing, Sing them over again to me, wonderful words of life, then sings my soul, my savior God to thee, how great thou art, since God is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?

Our scriptures and our hymns and our traditions tell us the value of singing our praise and worship of God, the value of rejoicing through song, through singing out loud.

The thing is, and I mean this with all due respect to Michael and the choir and our musicians: there's no real purpose to singing. We could take the hymns out of worship, and still have prayers and scripture and liturgy, valuable things, valuable worship. We don't have to sing, it's not required, and many people don't. Even if nobody sang, factories would still produce, fields would still grow, the earth would still turn. If you're cold, singing won't clothe you, if you're hungry, singing won't feed you. There is no purpose to singing, by which I mean, there is no purpose to singing except to sing. The purpose of it isn't to be really productive with it, or to see how much money you can make with it, or to make sure it's valuable enough. Singing is its own purpose. Singing is there to express something in a unique way. But it doesn't \*have\* to be done.

And yet, for us, as Christians, maybe it does. Because, as Zephaniah says, God exults over you with loud singing. It's Not just we who sing. God sings. Just

think about that for a second. Think about your concepts of God, and the way you think of God, and your relationship with God, and then consider whether God singing has been a part of that. Maybe it's not the first thing that comes to mind when you consider God, but our scripture says God exults over you with loud singing. So, if God does it, then stands to reason as people who follow God, that we ought to do it, too. Even if it's not productive in the way the world values productivity, even if it doesn't have any greater purpose than to shape us to be like the Lord, and express our faith. That is enough. That is purpose enough to sing.

More broadly, our scriptures tell us to rejoice, to rejoice in God our Savior, and we can do that through singing. Our songs and our singing can be an expression of everything we know and believe and give thanks for and proclaim. Singing is an extension of our faith.

Now, it's certainly not the only way, nor I am saying that it's better than any other way, but this singing out in joy, this rejoicing through song, is important for us, as people of faith to do. God does it, so we ought to do it. But specifically singing, because it asks more of us than just listening, than just having a song on in the background or thinking it through in our heads. Singing is a witness, a testimony—it is public, other people do hear it, but I guarantee they're not judging as much as we all seem to worry they are. But to sing out loud requires a public presence and declaration. Singing also makes physical demands of us. We have to think about our bodies and our breath. We have to use mind and mouth and eyes all at the same time. It asks something of us, it is an effort we make. And, singing hymns and prayers and liturgy helps us hear the same familiar words a little differently, in a way that makes us think about them more deeply. My favorite hymn is "My Shepherd Will Supply My Need", which is a retelling of that very familiar Psalm, Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. And because it's familiar, we may stop thinking about the words. But when I sing the final stanza of that hymn, "O May your house be my abode, and all my work be praise, there would I find a settled rest, while others go and come, No more a stranger, or a guest, but like a child at home"—it makes me think deeper about what that psalm is saying to me, it helps me express a joy and a faith that I hold already, but by singing it I'm even more aware.

And now, maybe it seems silly to sing, and for us all to sing, and especially when there is a lot of terrible news in the world, when there are so many other

more valuable things we could be doing with our time, when there doesn't seem to be any greater purpose, and it demands a lot of us. Maybe it seems silly to rejoice when there's not much to rejoice over. And yet, our scriptures say, we can choose to do so, even now. The people Zephaniah speaks to are in exile, but the prophet is telling them about the future, and saying God is singing even now, you can sing and rejoice even now. Mary is rejoicing in what is to come, and her life was not going to be easy, but she rejoices in God her Savior right now. Philippians was written from a prison cell and yet Paul says rejoice in the Lord always. Maybe things are not overly joyful right now, but we can still rejoice, we can still sing out our faith in what is to come, our trust in God who saves us, our hope that since God is Lord of heaven and earth, how can we keep from singing?

Let's rejoice in God our Savior. Let's rejoice in the Lord, always, even though it's not valued by the world's standards of productivity, even though sometimes it's hard and unfamiliar and a challenge, even though we don't have to. Let's remember that God is singing over us, and let's shape our lives to the Lord, singing and rejoicing here and now. Let's sing, out loud and boldly, let's sing as a witness to our faith, and let's rejoice in the Lord, who is rejoicing over us with singing. Amen.