

Psalm 98  
May 6, 2018

*<sup>1</sup>O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things.*

(An actual transcript of the sermon was not written. This a rough summary of it.)

I began running my senior year of seminary and ½ mile runs quickly turned into 1 mile, 2 mile, 4 mile, and eventually 8 mile runs. Somedays I would simply run and listen to the birds in the morning sing their songs of a new day as they praised and gave thanks to their Creator. Or, I would listen to the leaves in the trees blow and make a peaceful song as they ruffled against each other or watch the clouds in the sky dance silently across the blue sky making their own beautiful song. Other days, I would listen to music and had a playlist of 30-40 songs. Many were the time-tested classics. Others were recently added new songs. Runners will tell you they hit walls in the midst of runs. Mine was at 1 mile and then toward the end with about a mile to go. In these moments I would turn to a new song. A new fresh beat. New lyrics I would sing and it was the new songs that would give me a bit of extra bounce in my step and help me push onward.

Faith is a bit like that. We gather each Sunday and say the prayers, sings time-tested songs, confess our sins and hear the words of forgiveness, and join in the Lord's Supper but personally, I find myself almost going through the motions because they are things many of us have done for years, decades, etc. It's almost as if they lose a bit of their luster and importance. We take for granted the true impact on what the Holy Spirit does here and what a privilege it is to gather together. We take for granted what God in Christ did on the cross and through the resurrection.

Yesterday, Al, Jill, and myself went to the Southeastern Iowa Synod's newest congregation located within the walls of the Anamosa State Penitentiary called Free Indeed. Pastor Collell was here several weeks ago to speak about his new call. A new song is being sung there and I was reminded and opened again to the new song God keeps singing. Not that it is new. It's the same song of God's love. Christ's gift of love on the cross. Laying down his life for the world. Yet, this new congregation start among men whom in many cases have down horrific crimes and will never step foot beyond those walls of the congregation opened my eyes to the amazing gift of God's love. It was the new song I needed to hear. It's moments such as this I am so grateful and proud to be a part of the Southeastern Iowa Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to see what we are doing together.

These men welcomed us in. They were so hospitable and so appreciative we were there. That someone would care enough to take time out of their day and come worship with them. Not only that, they take seriously the words of the confession and forgiveness. Not that we don't but these words were new to many of them and they were words of grace knowing Jesus has already covered their sins. He has and will forgive them. They are loved and in the words of the gospel passage from John for that morning, Jesus has chosen them. He can use them in prison to sing that new song to others and invite them to hear the good news. There were many other things in this service that helped open my eyes, give me life, and sing once again to me that story of God's great love.

Sometimes, we need a new song. We need to try something new for the Spirit to wake us up, move us yet again, and help transform our hearts and minds. Amen.