

Psalm 96:1-9
October 18, 2020

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Amen.

I am grateful for Pastor Hougen's presence with you all last Sunday. I am grateful for the week of rest and relaxation I was able to enjoy with my son as we golfed our way along green fairways cut into the thick forests of Michigan – forests which I might add are now home to several dozen of waywardly hit golf balls. Nonetheless, that time away was like the half-time motivational speech my body had been aching for. I was tired and weary. It has been a long haul since March 13th, and it is pretty darn tough at times to see the light at the end of this tunnel we have found ourselves traveling in.

I know I am not alone. Many of my colleagues feel the same way. Many of you may be feeling the same way. In need of some much-needed rest and good news. Longing for a day off or weekend getaway. Hoping to spend Thanksgiving with your children or grandchildren you have not seen since this all started. We are tired. Weary. Worn down. Bugged down by one more candidate's phone call during this election season. Frustrated by the division and bantering that goes on by both parties. Is there no end in sight?

Perhaps, you are at a point in which you feel you have given everything you have got and simply need a break. Yet, you look up and realize it is only the end of the first quarter, or it's half-time, or it's the seventh-inning stretch or it's the turn between the ninth and tenth hole in which you visit the clubhouse for a quick bite to eat and refreshing beverage to help you finish strong. Maybe you need that motivational speech every good coach seems to have in his or her back pocket just ready to break out at the opportune time.

I want to read again the words from Psalm 96.

¹ O sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth.

- ² Sing to the Lord, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.
- ³ Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples.
- ⁴ For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
he is to be revered above all gods.
- ⁵ For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
but the Lord made the heavens.
- ⁶ Honor and majesty are before him;
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.
- ⁷ Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
- ⁸ Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts.
- ⁹ Worship the Lord in holy splendor;
tremble before him, all the earth.ⁱ

Also, the last 4 verses not included in the assigned text.

- ¹⁰ Say among the nations, "The Lord is king! The world is firmly established;
it shall never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity."
- ¹¹ Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
- ¹² let the field exult, and everything in it.
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
- ¹³ before the Lord; for he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.

I believe Psalm 96 is that motivational word of God we need today. It very well may have been for the people of God living in captivity at the hands of Babylon in the 6th century BCE. While its exact year and place of composition is in question, many scholars place it in this timeframe citing similarities in theme and language from the prophet Isaiah who wrote amidst this tragic moment in Israel's history as they had been displaced from their homeland. One can only imagine they were weary. Deeply saddened. Losing hope. Wondering if God would come and save them.

Listen to these words from Isaiah and see if they resonate with what we just read:

- Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise from the end of the earth! (Isaiah 42:10 NRSV)
- I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. (Isaiah 43:19 NRSV)

Both Isaiah and Psalm 96 remind the people there is one king and that is God. Each declare God's sovereignty among the nations and instill hope in the people of God to believe God will do a new thing. The exile they were currently living in would come to an end.

Kelly J. Murphy writes:

Psalm 96 is anything but miserable or depressing, even if it was perhaps composed in one of the most potentially depressing periods of ancient Israelite history. The psalm looks forward to a time when Yahweh will act yet again. At the same time, the psalm does not ask its listeners to wait passively for the establishment of justice on earth. The series of imperatives throughout the psalm remind listeners themselves to also act: to sing, bless, tell, and declare. These imperatives, all in the plural, demand that everyone act. And the inclusion of all throughout the psalm -- all the peoples, families, nations, and, indeed, the very heavens, seas, fields, and trees -- reminds listeners of how bound together creation is. Together, the psalmist says, hope, even in the face of misery. Celebrate. But together, too, work.ⁱⁱ

There is a time a time for rest. There is a time to be frustrated, saddened, anxious, even angered; but Psalm 96 may be the rallying cry we need as it reminds the people of God there is also a time to sing, bless, tell, and declare. That time is now. For Israel that new song and hope was God remaining faithful to God's covenantal people and returning them from exile to their homeland.

As Christians, that new song and hope is the saving grace we have in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. In Jesus, God has done a new thing. Psalm 96 begs us to continually ask ourselves, “What song are we singing?” Yes, I know physically singing with our voices has been tampered by this virus and is one precautionary measure we all wish we could toss by the wayside; yet we still sing through our words and actions. What song are we, as a community in Christ, singing?

As I try to imagine the people in exile hearing the words of this psalm spoken, I picture their heads begin to lift high to the skies. Perhaps, their arms open wide and hands raise to the heavens. I harken it to a worn out and weary team in the locker room at half-time. The coach comes in, sees their weariness, and then begins to speak until finally the team rises, joins and shouts out a rallying cry together. In this case, God takes center stage through the words of this psalm (and Isaiah) speaking into them life that will renew their once dry bones. They will once again be reminded of who they are and recall their purpose as God’s chosen people – to tell of God’s salvation from day to day, declare God’s glory among the nations, and God’s’ marvelous works among all peoples.

I have been watching a show on Apple TV called *Ted Lasso*. Ted is an American football coach who takes on a new challenge to coach a struggling London football (i.e., soccer) team in the top flight of English football. In the final episode of season 1 prior to one of the clubs biggest matches against its biggest rival and much on the line in a game many think they cannot win, Ted gathers the team and says, “So I’ve been hearing this phrase y’all have over here that I ain’t too crazy about, it’s the hope that kills you. Y’all know that. I disagree. I think it’s the lack of hope that comes and gets you. See I believe in hope. I believe in believe.”

We are people of hope. Cruciform hope. Resurrection hope. We believe in hope. Hope will be our song. The Lord is king will be our song. The salvation of our Lord will be our song. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised is our song. We believe – in God, the Father. We believe – in Jesus Christ. We believe – in the Holy Spirit. We believe God will bring new life. We believe God is with us. We believe Jesus is alive. We believe our voices will sing aloud together again.

Now, sent by the Spirit, let us get out there and let our life song sing. Let our love for God and for another be known. Let our shouts of “Alleluia” be heard on every street corner. Let us tell what God has done. Let us remind the world, “You are loved.” Amen.

ⁱ Psalm 96:1-9 (NRSV)

ⁱⁱ Kelly J. Murphy, Commentary on Psalm 96; www.workingpreacher.org