

**FONTHILL UNITED CHURCH**  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter - Sunday April 11, 2021

**REFLECTION:** “Engineering A New Normal”

Psalm 33 asks us to respect the Lord. It asks all the inhabitants of the world to stand in awe of our Creator, because when the Creator spoke, the earth came to be, and at its command, it stood firm. The Psalm asks us to consider this firm, constant, abiding, upright nature of God and God’s Creation. “The word of the Lord is upright,” the Psalm reminds us. “God’s work is done in faithfulness. God is constant in his love of righteousness and justice.”

And yet, in the midst of all this joyful certainty about God and the goodness of Creation, the constant faithfulness and love of God, there is unease. There is a realization that in contrast to this wonderful true constant love, that is so worthy of our praise, and a melody played skillfully on a harp with ten strings, to be sung out lustily, that we are not quite as faithful. We are not quite as loving. We do not love righteousness and justice quite as much.

And so, the Psalmist asks us to consider singing to the Lord, a new song.

A new song.

A song which might be more pleasing to God than the songs we are currently singing.

A song as faithful, as constant, as loving, as steadfast, and as full of righteousness and justice as God’s song to us is.

A song still without words. A song with a melody that continues to elude us. A song lacking a key and time signature.

A song we do not know how to sing.

A song we need ourselves to create and bring out of our own darkness.

A new song.

No one likes to sing a new song. Bill can tell you that when he is introducing his choir to the new songs that he expects his choirs to sing, they grumble, they complain, they threaten to quit, they resist, they decide that they hate the new song. Indeed, Bill can tell you that the job of a choir director, is often principally that of cajoling, bribing and by hook and by crook, managing to get his choir to embrace the unknown.

But it is not just choirs, who do not like to sing a new song. And yet, as world events and personal circumstances change, we are forced constantly to adapt and to sing new songs.

Over the past year, here at Fonthill United, the presence of a new minister has forced you to sing a new song. COVID19 has forced you to sing a new song. And the song we have sung together is certainly unknown, and strange. A song we have never sung before.

For much of the past year the new song that we have been singing has been a song of lament – a song looking back at what we have lost, and what we miss, and what we mourn. People have died. Businesses we love have disappeared forever. Friendships have withered because of social distancing. We miss travel, new experiences, and a heady social calendar. We miss hugs, a hand to hold, a full house at Christmas and Easter. Concerts and plays. We have a lot to lament.

And yet, the song of lament is also getting old. It is becoming the old well-known song. Like the Israelites in the desert wandering towards the unknown promise of a land of milk and honey, our song looks back lamenting what we knew.

Rapid social change can do this. And yet, the new song the Psalmist seems to ask us to sing, is a joyous one – one that looks forward to the steadfast, righteous and justice loving faithfulness of God.

I think the New Song the Psalmist is asking us to sing is a song we can raise up to God as we move into the new thing that God is doing. It is nothing less than the imaging of what we want our world to be like, after we are vaccinated, and slowly the terror of COVID19 starts to wane. It is the song of the life we want to live after the time of the flood, when we walk out from the ark on the mountaintop, surrounded by the promise of the rainbow. It is the song of the community that Moses taught the Israelites to sing in the desert, as they were looking back, but which helped them look forward as a new society bound together by a new Covenant, with new rules and expectations for how everyone might get along.

And, it is the new song which we see the disciples singing in Acts today.

You will remember how, at our Good Friday service, our readings ended with the empty tomb on Easter morning, and how Mary and the woman were only able to see what was not there. Easter morning starts with a painful looking back at the life of Jesus and the sad lament that all that the followers of Jesus knew is gone.

The disciples could have stayed in that deep experience of loss indefinitely. And yet, they decide instead to see a resurrection. They decide to sing a new song. And as they start singing that new song, they have a sort of similar desert experience to the Israelites.

As the Israelites leave Egypt, they mourn what they knew, but also come to understand that Pharaoh and slavery are not righteous and just. That Pharaoh is not God's plan. As they embrace the 10 commandments, they engage in the new song of becoming what Walter Brueggemann calls the "Alternative Community of God." A way of being that is better and more godly than the way of living that they know. A way forward to freedom and justice.

In our New Testament reading for today, the mention of Herod and Pilate and the whole society that caused Jesus to die, is there because, the disciples have said enough. They have broken irrevocably with that old system of being a people.

*'The kings of the earth took their stand,  
and the rulers have gathered together  
against the Lord and against his Messiah.'*

They realize that the old way of living was not life-giving. They mourn Jesus, and in doing so, they turn away finally from the slavery that claims them. They sense that there is another song to sing, in which rather than grant power to evil, they themselves start to become the new community, the new normal. They pray for their own community and their own way of being, asking the Lord to allow them to "to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

The new alternative community of Christ, is formed as a new song, that keeps Christ at the center, and the central teaching of Jesus uppermost. You shall love the lord your God with all your heart, and you shall love your neighbour as yourself.

And this is not just words. Like Karl Marx, like Moses, the disciples sing this new song by engaging in intentional acts of social engineering. "Filled with the spirit, the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common."

Indeed, this is not just an idea. Acts tells us of someone who actually does this. There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means

“son of encouragement”). He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

Your offering today, and the way that you all give to the church so that you may enjoy the blessings of community and faith leadership and the gift of new music every week, and pastoral care – stems from this radical new way of social engineering that the first Christians established. We still sing this new song, and it is very different from the song of the world. We give because we want to share. Because we believe that everyone should be able to benefit. Because we believe that everyone is worthy of God’s love, grace and forgiveness, and because we believe that a church like this makes this possible.

And yet, we have a new song to sing. We have learned so much about how society is not working over the last year. We have a new song to sing.

I think the song lifts up foreign workers.

I think the song lifts up essential workers paid minimum wage.

I think the song exposes what we have allowed to happen in some long term care facilities and the way our society treats the elderly.

I think the song laments all the cracks in our society that were so easy to sweep under the carpet before COVID, and refuses to allow them to be swept back there when things get better.

I think the song lifts up our deep awareness that things are so much better when we are together.

I think the song says that while the virus is terrifying, life and creation are still precious and worthwhile.

I think the song wonders about the opportunities we have to move into a new vision for humankind.

I think the song makes us a better people. A more caring people. A more compassionate people.

I think the song makes the resurrection we need, possible.

I think the song remembers that we are different, and yet one.