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Aug

Sing Praises

Praise Break

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, YEAR A

This week centers on remembering as an act of praise, highlighting how singing helps us tell the story of God’s faithfulness. Drawing from the psalms and the tradition of hymn-singing, it invites congregations to use music as a way to share personal and collective stories—turning worship into a participatory expression of gratitude, memory, and praise.

REFERENCES

Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28

Psalms 105: 1-6, 16-22, 45b

Romans 10:5-15

Matthew 14:22-33

COLORS

Green

Preaching Notes

Focus text: **Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b**

Once again, the preparers of the lectionary made an absolute hash of this psalm. It is hard to get a sense of the flow from the verses assigned. This means that the preacher is left with the choice of following the strictures of the lectionary or opening up the whole psalm for consideration. It seems that those two options would lead to two very different sermons. While we could argue that the selected verses give us a hint of the story of the contentious escape from Egypt, they manage to

avoid wrestling with the effect of the plagues on the Egyptian people, even as they facilitate an escape from bondage for the Hebrews.

Maybe that isn't something one wants to wrestle with here in the dog days of summer. So, let's look at the verses assigned and let this praise break be a moment to breathe this summer—especially since the psalmist's call is to sing. Any singer will tell you that good breathing is important to good singing. Sing to God, the psalm encourages – or commands – sing praises! That is what this is all about, even the retelling we skip over or shorten in our discomfort. It is a call to praise with the whole self, and that is best done singing.

We Methodists say that we were born in song. Other traditions focus on doctrine or liturgy, and we have those too. But the power and the passion of the movement were in the singing. Charles Wesley was as much a shaper of Methodism as was his more organizationally minded brother John. Charles wove theology into the hymns alongside the poetry and the beauty of the singing—corporate singing. That's at the heart of the invitation as well. The command is plural. All y'all sing!

What do we sing? The glory of God's name, the strength of the Lord, the joy of seeking and basking in the presence of our Savior. But a key instruction, one that is behind all the rest of the psalm, even the skipped verses, is to remember. It is impossible to overstate how important this call to remember is. We could argue that "to remember" is the last command Jesus gives his followers at his ascension. He tells them at the end of the Gospel of Matthew to go and make disciples, to baptize, and to teach; then the last word is "remember." "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age"(Matthew 28:20 NRSV).

We sing because we remember or we want to remember. We sing to help us remember. We sing the stories of God at work among us. We sing the anticipation of God working even now. We sing of how even in the worst circumstances, when things are most dire, there is a ribbon of hope, a thread of liberation at work. We cling to that. To tell the stories and sing the songs of liberation is not to deny the reality of oppression, but to offer a promise of redemption, no matter how dire the situation. We cling to hope; we remember hope. We sing what we remember, or we remember what we sing.

Certainly, the opening verses of this psalm and the final phrase are generic enough for us to lean into a praise break. Generic seems dismissive. That isn't what is implied. But the psalm is one of many inviting us to see the goodness of God and to sing our praise without restraint. But then we are given verses 16 through 22 as a part of the reading this week. What do we do with this? How much of the Exodus story do we need to recount for this to be understandable? What context do we

need to provide? These are important questions to ask. We can no longer assume the biblical story is familiar to all those who gather. The psalmist unpacks the story with clear intention—certainly, in the verses we have assigned. That intention is that God is at work, even in the direst of circumstances. It may be hidden, and it will definitely be surprising, but God is at work.

God's instruments are at hand. That is what we celebrate or at least acknowledge. The underlying message is that we may be those instruments. We may be the undercover agents for the kingdom of God at work in the world around us. We may be the seed planted, the yeast embedded, the salt applied to give flavor or provide traction in a slippery time. We may be Joseph appointed to lead God's people through a famine of the lack of righteousness.

These are the songs that need to be sung today: songs of praise of a God who shows a better way, a more loving way, a more healing way. Even when the resources seem scarce and the opportunities few, we sing praises.

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