

Psalm 40:1-11 For the director of music. Of David. A psalm. I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. ² He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. ³ He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD. ⁴ Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods. ⁵ Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare. ⁶ Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; {6 Hebrew; Septuagint but a body you have prepared for me burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. ⁷ Then I said, "Here I am, I have come-- it is written about me in the scroll. {7 Or come with the scroll written for me} ⁸ I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." ⁹ I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, as you know, O LORD. ¹⁰ I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly. ¹¹ Do not withhold your mercy from me, O LORD; may your love and your truth always protect me.

“Singing a New Song”

These last two weeks I've introduced you folks to some new thoughts about heaven and the church. They aren't new thoughts so to speak. They are biblical thoughts that have been repressed by, for lack of better words, pop Christianity or rather medieval Christianity to be precise. I've told you that in the biblical worldview Heaven is not some way far away place disconnected from Earth where immortal souls go after people die. Rather, Heaven is itself part of God's Creation. It overlaps the Earth yet is invisible to us. God has chosen to be eternally present in Heaven and to reign from Heaven. Sometimes, such as happened at Jesus' baptism heaven is opened so that we can see in. So also, sometimes God's reign breaks forth from Heaven into Earth where things are healed and made the way they are supposed to be such as when the Church worships and people get healed.

Another thing I said is that the Church, you and me and us together not the building, is the place where Heaven and Earth not only overlap but are in union by means of the presence of the Holy Spirit with and in us. The Holy Spirit bonds us to Jesus. Since we are being bound to Jesus and share in his resurrected life, we the church, you and I and us together, is where end times New Creation is beginning to break forth into the present; the New Creation where Heaven and Earth are one and Earth is full of the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9). This occurs particularly in our worship and in the way we love one another as God has loved us each.

To say that we the Church are new creation is a pretty radical. Yet, 2 Corinthians 5:17 reads, "therefore, if anyone is in Christ; there is new creation. The old age has passed away. Behold, he has become new (age)." Paul is not saying; "the person who has made the decision to believe that Jesus' death has gotten her sins forgiven and in that decision has gotten herself right with God and

will go to Heaven rather than Hell when she dies. No! He is saying that the person who is in Christ, meaning united to him in the Holy Spirit, is now New Creation. The old way of being human is gone. She is now begun to be made new. By the presence and work of the Holy Spirit the new life of Jesus' resurrection has made and is making her to be New Creation.

Now, I've talked about you and I and us together as being united in Christ in the Holy Spirit and that's what makes us New Creation. I'm guessing that you want me to explain that a bit. I know I would. You see, I was raised in a form of Christianity that didn't talk about union with Christ in the Holy Spirit but only talked about accepting Jesus as your personal saviour so that you can go to Heaven when you die and until then you must dutifully serve in the church and be a good person. But, in being in that belief system I had no idea what it was like to really know, to really feel, that God loved me. I was always trying to keep on God's good side so he wouldn't get me. And, if I was good enough, maybe he'd give me the things I wanted. My religion was all about my decision and my efforts and nothing at all about God being faithful to me because he loves me. In that old belief system I had no idea how good it is to be in the presence of the Lord among his people gathered for worship. I had no idea how good it felt to be forgiven and then made able to forgive myself and others. I had no idea how good it felt to be healed of some very deep emotional wounds. I had no idea of these things because the churches of my youth had no idea that the Holy Spirit was still around. In that old belief system the Holy Spirit was just another character in the Bible that did some wonderful things and got the church going, but since then, he's gone back to heaven so we can work out what it is to be the Church.

So, how to begin talking about the Holy Spirit. Well, the Holy Spirit brings us to Jesus and also brings Jesus to us. When being personally confronted by Jesus we find ourselves changed forever. I heard a good sermon last week at Presbytery. The preacher was Doug McQuaig from St. Andrew's Streetsville. His text was the gospel of Mark 1:40-2:15. The passage first tells of a leper coming to Jesus requesting to be healed and Jesus heals him. Next, four men come to Jesus bringing a paralyzed man on a mat to be healed. Jesus, upon seeing their faith, said to the man, "Son, your sins are forgiven." This struck the religious authorities as wrong. So to prove he had authority to forgive sins, Jesus healed the man. Finally, Jesus himself approaches a tax collector named Levi and says, "Follow me." Levi gets up and follows him. Dr. McQuaig's point was that all three of these people came to Jesus in different ways for different reasons and they all left the encounter forever changed. The leper came on his own initiative knowing Jesus could heal him. And Jesus cleansed him of his leprosy so that he could return to being a part of his community. The paralytic was brought to Jesus by his friends. And Jesus saw that the root of his paralysis was a crippling sense of guilt. So Jesus forgave him and made him walk again. In Levi's case, Jesus approached him out of the blue and for some unexplained reason, he up and followed and became Matthew, one of the 12 disciples and the writer of the first gospel. The Holy Spirit brings us to Jesus and in that encounter we are changed forever.

King David in Psalm 40 gives us a really good description of how this feels. I wish this were a bible study where I could just go hog-wild with you on the imagery that the Hebrew language has in its simplicity that gets a wee bit lost in our English translations. Anyhow, such is my passion for working with these passages in the original languages. For King David, his experience of the steadfast love and faithfulness of Yahweh, the Hebrew name for God, to him, a man so deep in the mess of his own demise brought about by his own doings, was like being taken from a muddy pit of horror and being placed on a high rocky cliff where you can just see and see and see and see and you don't have to worry about falling off because the Lord has made your footsteps firm. To King David that's what it was like to encounter the steadfast love and faithfulness of God which we encounter as a personal relationship with God the Father, in God the Son, by means of God the Holy Spirit.

One of my seminary professors, Paul Achtemeier, in his commentary on Romans, explains the wrath of God (the wrath of God is when God is holding us accountable). He says the consequence of sin is having to live with the consequences of sin. It's not that if we sin God will get us. Rather, it's that our selfishness, our bad decisions, our hurtful actions, and sometimes even the good we do have consequences in real life and sooner or later, it all catches up to us because God steps back and lets it happen. David, in Psalm 40, is saying that at this moment in his life, when the wrath of God (having to live with the consequences of sin) has caught up with him, this moment when God has stepped back and allowed sin to run its course, he found God merciful and present with his steadfast love and faithfulness. Because even as God has stepped back so that David could learn his lesson, the lesson he has had to learn is that God is with him in steadfast love and faithfulness. As the result, David the sinner stands in the midst of the gathering of the people to say, “I royally, literally royally, screwed up. And in abandoning me to the consequences of my actions, God has actually stepped into my life making his steadfast love and faithfulness evident to me.”

How did God step in? This is beautiful! Apparently, David has had an experience in reading a scroll of the book that became the sound of God's own voice speaking to him. Somewhere in some form of the Bible he was reading, back there in the midst of sulking about because his sins had caught up to him, David comes across a passage that speaks to him, that speaks to him in such a way as to describe his own heart. “I delight in doing your will, O God, your law is in my inmost being.”

Basically, David is standing there in the midst of deep doo-doo and heard the word of the Lord that the Lord knows that the true intention of his heart is to do the Lord's will and delight in it. In knowing that God knows his heart he sings a new song, a song of praise, and those who mocked him in his fallenness better look out. Also, David begins to understand that God isn't really into sacrifices or offerings by which we try to get and keep God on our side. Rather, David now understands that God has cut two holes in his head into which ears fit. What God really wants is for us to hear him when he speaks his steadfast love and faithfulness to us, and obey him in praise and obedience.

“Singing the New Song”

When I speak of the Holy Spirit coming into our lives, this little bit from David sets the stage. God makes us to know that in, through, and as, Jesus Christ, God has proven his steadfast love and faithfulness and in his mercy he has, in us, inaugurated the end times and made us to be people of the New Creation: people so wrapped in the love of God that we cannot help but proclaim his praise and tell of what he's done for us in remaining faithful to us when we've been and are so unfaithful to him. Glory be to God. He really does love us. That's the new song we sing. Amen.