

St. Peter Lutheran Church - Modesto, CA

✠ Fourth Sunday in Lent ✠

March 18, 2007

Sermon by Pastor Johann Caauwe

"In that day you will say:

"I will praise you, O Lord. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me. ² Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation." ³

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

⁴ In that day you will say:

"Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted. ⁵ Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world. ⁶ Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you."

(Isaiah 12:1-6)

Do you know what good singing is? Some of you would probably say that the music that we just heard—that was good singing. Some of you might watch something like American Idol and you could give a better critique than Randy, Paula, or Simon. Others of you might simply suggest that the best singing is someone else singing.

But did you know that the Bible doesn't do that? It's not that the Bible doesn't talk about singing. It does that a lot. But the Bible never talks about good or bad singing. And as far as I can tell, it never refers to the quality of a person's voice or about how well they stay on pitch or in tempo.

In fact, the only modifier that is regularly attached to singing is not good or bad, but *joyful*. In the Bible, people don't sing because they have beautiful voices or even because they like to sing. They sing because they are full of joy. They sing because they are so bursting with joy that ordinary words simply won't get the job done.

And so they sing. Now, singing in Bible times was probably different than singing today. They probably had a broader definition that included what we might call chanting or even shouting. But what that means is that when Isaiah writes to God's people and tells them to shout aloud and sing for joy, he's not just talking to members of the choir. He's not just talking about people who just love singing or who have sweet angelic voices. He is talking to each one of us because each one of us has a song to sing. This song has two parts. Part of it is a solo, and the solo sings of salvation. But the other part is written for a choir and is a grand proclamation of praise.

First of all, Isaiah tells us when to start singing: **"In that day you will say."** "That day" is the time when God has kept his promises to us, when God has done for us everything that he said. So, basically, "that day" is now. **"In that day you will say."** You can't see this in English, but this "you" is singular. It's a solo. Or at the very least it's in unison because we're all singing the same

tune. What are we singing? First verse: **“I will praise you, O Lord. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me.”** God was angry with me. You see it has to be a solo here, because I can’t put the blame on anyone else. I can’t blame you. I can’t even blame Adam and Eve; they had their own song to sing. And I certainly can’t blame God for my rebellion against him. He was angry, and he had every right to be.

But look what happened. **“your anger has turned away.”** Notice it doesn’t say that God stopped being angry. He just wasn’t angry with us. Just fast forward a couple weeks to Good Friday and there you’ll see where God’s anger landed. Not on you. Not on me. It landed on an innocent man who willingly took the heat for our sin and faced the music for our misbehavior.

Even as we watch Jesus take God’s anger for us, he comforts us with the knowledge that it was his love for us that led him to the cross. Now it’s time to sing: **“Surely God is my salvation; I will trust in him and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.”** This is my solo: God saved me, even me.

But as great as this song is, there’s still another verse, and this one calls for more singers. Isaiah repeats, **“In that day you will say”** Again, you can’t see this in English, but here, the you is plural. Now it’s a choir. Now all of the individuals who have drawn from the wells of salvation, who have singularly received God’s salvation come together into a body of believers we call the church. And they have a song to sing, too. **“Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world.”**

Essentially, this second verse is much like the first. It’s still a song of what God has done, but here, not just for us, but for all the world. And our song must go out to them.

Can you see why this has to be a choral piece? I can’t sing loud enough for the whole world to hear. Neither can you. Neither, in fact, can a 50-some voice traveling choir. But, when we proclaim the name of the Lord (here or in Wisconsin), when we proclaim the glorious things God has done, we do so in concert with our brothers and sisters all over the world. That’s what makes it so important for us to sing the same song—to always proclaim purely and truthfully what God has done. When we do that, all our voices blend into one glorious song of praise that reaches from shore to shore and will continue to be heard throughout the world, through all generations, until Christ comes to take us home.

More than once someone has told me that they weren’t really excited about going to heaven because they didn’t like the idea of singing for all eternity. What if I don’t enjoy singing? What if I can’t carry a tune? But you see, the song of the people of Zion, the song of the saints on earth and the hosts of heaven is not about pretty voices. It’s not just about our favorite pastimes. In fact, it’s not about us at all. **“God is my salvation; God is my song.”** Our song is about God’s salvation for each one of us—a solo. And it’s about joining together to proclaim that salvation to the world—that’s a choir. And if we sing this song, if this is what our song is all about, then it doesn’t matter what sound comes out when we open our mouth, the notes will simply fall into place. Amen.