



Week 1: Comfort in Music: The Song of Miriam

(Exodus 15.20-21)

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Bible Reading

Exodus 15.1-3;11; 20-21

The Israelites sang this song to the LORD:
“I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.
The LORD is my strength and my might
and he has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him,
my father’s God, and I will exalt him.
The LORD is a warrior;
the LORD is his name...

“Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods?
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
awesome in splendour, doing wonders?
Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron’s sister, took a
tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after
her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam sang
to them:
“Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.”

Reflection

I have been reflecting on the power of music, to teach, to soothe, to inspire, to empower, to comfort, to calm, to encourage - to move us to prayer. What songs or hymns do you remember from your childhood? Which ones did you memorise, without even trying to?

Which tunes or words carry you through hard times? Which hymns did you miss most during lockdown? Which ones make your eyes well up with tears because of a memory - a funeral, a wedding or a special event? Which ones make you laugh?

Music can teach a child to read and to sleep. It is also one of the last things to go to in later years: my grandfather-in-law who suffers from dementia still plays the piano beautifully. Dying people sometimes respond to their favourite hymn. Songs can stir up deep memories.

The song of Miriam is an erupting, joyful and comforting song of hope and victory, despite struggles and anxieties. Miriam took up her musical instrument and together with the Israelite community, they all sang a new song. They sang not as sad and neglected people, but as God's chosen people, beloved of God (Jeremiah 32.38).

Despite the fear of death and the unknown, new hope, new possibilities opened before them because of what God had done for his people and what he might do again in the future.

I wonder what new song we will sing beyond the pandemic as we learn to live with Covid? What song are we already singing during the pandemic as we remember God's promise never to leave us or forsake us? The song of Miriam is a song about the amazing works of the Lord and a song about who God is. Here lies the model for true worship.

It teaches us firstly to worship the almighty Lord for what he has previously done and for what he will do in the future and secondly to worship God for who he is. We acknowledge his great acts through joys and sorrows, ups and downs, successes and failures, illness and good health, because whatever happens he remains God – our heavenly Father - and his love for us never changes. His love for us has no bounds. It remains constant.

I once heard a retired priest say, 'God is always in the background even when it does not feel as though he is'. The easiest way to remind ourselves and to encourage us to trust in God's faithfulness is to sing songs of praise and worship to God. Singing is one of the purest forms of praying, as St Augustine affirmed when he wrote, "To sing is to pray twice".

Hymn

Our God, Our Help in Ages Past, Our Hope for Years to Come *(Isaac Watts)*

Our God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home:

Under the shadow of your throne
your saints have dwelt secure;
sufficient is your arm alone,
and our defence is sure.

Before the hills in order stood
or earth received its frame,
from everlasting you are God,
to endless years the same.

A thousand ages in your sight
are like an evening gone,
short as the watch that ends the night
before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
soon bears us all away;
we fly forgotten, as a dream
dies at the opening day.

Our God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
still be our guard while troubles last,
and our eternal home!

Prayer

God of comfort and love, we give you thanks for your promises and your ever-abiding presence with us during difficult and fearful times.

May your Holy Spirit, the Comforter, remain among individuals, families, communities and nations during the pandemic and beyond.

May our trust in you be affirmed as we worship you in Spirit and in truth.

We ask this through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.