

## Rise Up Song

Are you tired of Covid? I am. I am tired of the restrictions that dampen wedding, birthday, anniversary, and Christmas celebrations, and cancels long anticipated travel. Does it exhaust you when people demand more of you than you have to give? I admit it's easier to check out during zoom meetings. Do you ever feel like a fake Christian? Does the song in your head sound angry, sad, cynical, or lonely.

And yet. Today we have the audacity to light the candle of joy and we dare to sing and read the songs recorded in Scripture. Instead of "How dare we sing and speak of joy when people are sick and dying, isolated and afraid." we embrace the challenge: "I dare you!" I dare you to sing out people of God! Now for those who can't carry a tune, what does that look like?

This past week I spoke to someone whose mother died in care without her able to be there. She said to me "It was a blessing. She died in her sleep. She believed the Lord would meet her." This woman is singing even while she mourns. A beloved member who is bed bound received some Purdy's chocolates and said with a smile - "Oh! I have a good appetite!" She is singing although she is weak and alone. Where have you heard people singing this week in imperfect circumstances?

The songs recorded in Isaiah, in Psalm 126, and in Luke have some things in common.

**First, They are singing when they don't feel like it. They are imperfect people living in imperfect times and they sing of the way God wants things to be. All of them point to reversal of the status quo.**

**Second, They are singing as though something that is nowhere in sight, has already arrived. They use imagination injected with faith.**

**Third, They are singing because God is already bringing change - and using their voice to bring it. The song itself is transformative. The song is not just moving deck chairs on the Titanic. The song moves the icebergs. It changes the fundamental outcome of our stories.**

The three songs read this morning are completely aware of the bad news. They put their finger into the wound marks of society. But they are not satisfied with wailing in the dust. These songs are courageous: they are **RISE UP songs** and my friends - if there is ever a time we need a RISE UP song, it is now.

Let's first look at the Isaiah passage. The book, as many know, takes its name after the prophet Isaiah who lived in Jerusalem in 742 BCE at a time when the Assyrians were a threat. But Babylon destroys Jerusalem and the temple and carries off the leaders to exile. Second Isaiah is a disciple of that first prophet and speaks to the people during exile in Babylon. Today's passage is from Third Isaiah when the people have returned to rebuild the temple and Jerusalem. The prophets Ezra and Nehemiah also speak during this time. There are arguments about their building strategy. Build the fortifications around the city to protect the people first or build the temple. Or do they do both at the same time? Isaiah is speaking to a divided people and a ruined city and yet his primary concern is about the oppressed, the broken-hearted, the captives and prisoners, those who are debt slaves, those who mourn and those with a faint spirit. **This is a "Rise Up" song.** The people cannot **build** anything until **they love what God loves**. Jesus read this Isaiah passage in his home synagogue as his first public statement according to Luke 4:18. This song from Isaiah was Jesus' rise up song. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

And Jesus became a rise up song.

Psalm 126 is an action song. People are weeping, and yet they pick up their bag of seed and head to the fields to plant. Imagine those with slumped shoulders and weeping eyes bearing their grief while daring to plant. They don't feel like

planting in this environment when hearts are dry, and the earth unyielding. Their action of planting is their rise up song. It is an act of defiance. The neighbours shake their head and call them weird. Those who plant are out of step. But are they? It is when the silence is deafening that we are called to march and sing a hallelujah because God is already redeeming the land, preparing the soil, and expecting us to tune the instruments for the harvest party.

The song of Mary too is meant for the tired, and the hard hearted, the angry, and sad. It is a warning to the comfortable, the powerful and the rich. The song has been sung by Hanna in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Hannah was a barren woman beyond the age of bearing children who gave birth to the prophet Samuel. Just as Sarah gave birth to Isaac and Elizabeth will give birth to John. The strange thing about this song is that you would have thought that Elizabeth would have sung it and in fact, some manuscripts say that she did. But it is Mary, a young woman, who has learned her song from an old woman. Hear this older women - if you dare to hear. We best be singing our rise up songs loud enough for the young women to hear because "Rise up" songs don't care how old you are.

In the movie "The Grinch", the thing that changes the very small heart of the bitter outcast named the Grinch, is a song. He has been hurt by cruelty and so he lives apart with hatred for those who have hurt him. He wants revenge for his pain so he seeks to ruin what they most value - Christmas. He steals all the presents, decorations, Christmas trees, and lights from the town, trying to shut down Christmas. But when all those things are stripped from Whoville, the Whos wake up, join hands and sing. They sing.

"And the Grinch, with his Grinch-feet ice cold in the snow, stood puzzling and puzzling, how could it be so? It came without ribbons, It came without tags. It came without packages, boxes or bags. And he puzzled and puzzled till his puzzler was sore. Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't thought before. What if Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store. What if Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more."

The hard little heart of the angry outcast expands. And the rest of the story is about the prodigal returning home. The great reversal is a human redemption

song. It's one of our favorites. Echoed in movies like "It's a Wonderful Life" and "A Christmas Carol".

Rise up songs change us and change the world.

Rise up songs are not primarily about us making things better. It's about what God has already accomplished. The great reversal has already happened in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It continues to happen all around us - within us - in spite of us - because of us.

Hear a rise up song I heard this week from Gregory Boyle, a Jesuit priest who founded the largest gang intervention and rehabilitation program in the world. He says, "Success is not the same as joy. The only way to not burn out is to make it about the other. Make it about the present moment. To love being love. The moment it's about saving, fixing, rescuing, reaching people, you're going to burn out... You wanna go where the joy is. There are only two things that Jesus hopes for of Christian communities: joy, and that you may be one."

I'd like to show part of a video clip that comes from Kairos - the ecumenical program engaging us to "faithful action for justice and peace".