

When I was in college, I felt compelled to try out for the praise band at Virginia Tech as a vocalist. While there, they asked me if I played any instruments and I mentioned I played the guitar, so they had me audition on the guitar as well.

The next week, I found out I had made the band, not for my primary instrument, my voice, but of my newly acquired and still in progress guitar skills. Clearly, they really needed a guitar player. Before this time, I had played here and there, but always on my own terms and never in a band.

I had to learn a new way of learning and playing music. Although I could play some by ear, as a classically trained vocalist, I had always known music to be something that was on a piece of paper that had a score and some notes. The notes told me what I should and should not do and I liked these notes. In the praise band, I was given chord sheets that told me when to change chords, but I had to follow the lead singer to know when these chords were changing.

It was more about feeling the music than reading the music and that was new for me, but I liked it. So, I learned this new type of music, this new thing of being in a band and making one sound together, having to read one another.

As I was reflecting on our Scripture from Psalm 96, I was reminded, **as the people of God, we are all called to sing a new song.**

This means that no matter how comfortable we are with the songs, with the life we know, God calls us out of our comfort zones into something new, something uncharted, but God calls us to do this together. God calls us out of the slavery of sin, into freedom through our faith in Jesus Christ.

This is our story. In Exodus, we read that the Israelites were a people called out of slavery and oppression, into the wilderness, so that they could reach the Promised Land. I would imagine that all throughout their journey they sang songs of grief for leaving their old life, songs of despair about being in the wilderness, and even songs of joy that God saved them from the hands of the Egyptians. It was hard for them to learn a new song, a new reality, and a new vision, but that is the beauty of music, isn't it?

Music evokes within us imagination for a new reality, a different way of being that we can live into until we believe it for ourselves.

I think more than anything during worship we are all missing singing our favorite hymns. Even though we have been able to do some of this together online nothing

beats being able to sing together in our sanctuaries. These hymns remind us who God is and who God is calling us to be.

But God is teaching us a new song during this season of our lives. Instead of learning new hymns we are learning new ways to worship God with our lives both within and beyond these walls.

Many scholars believe that our Psalm for today was written to be “sung in the Temple upon the occasion of the re-enthronement of God at an annual New Year Festival.”ⁱ How perfect is that?

This is the song people sang to reinstate God as the king of their lives. Each year, they would celebrate this important day, sing this song, and recognize God as the Lord of our lives. And that is not all, they would also be invited once again to share their faith with others.ⁱⁱ They were invited to continue to be a witness for God at all times and in all places.

The founder of our denomination, John Wesley, was passionate about praising God through music. He took it so seriously that he even wrote “Directions for Singing” which can be found in the hymnal. They are quite entertaining, but the heart of this action by Wesley is that the gathered community of God is called to worship in one unified voice.

As United Methodists, we are people who sing our faith. John Wesley knew this. He knew that music was powerful. It was a way to worship God. John’s brother, Charles Wesley, is a composer of many of our hymns. He would take bar tunes and other common tunes that most people knew and change the words to them so that people would learn the Christian faith and come to know God more deeply.

Church, I chose this scripture today because I believe it is time for us to learn a new song in the life of our church. It is time for us, like the Israelites, like the Methodists before us, to be unified and worship God with one voice. Although we are not able to sing, we are called to reclaim our worship of God.

Instead of being in despair over the things we cannot do during this time, we are called to celebrate the things we can do. We are still able to gather, we are still able to hear the word of God, we are still able to pray for one another and offer ourselves and our gifts to God. We are still able, just like so many people before us, to put our trust in God.

Today it is refreshing for us to hear the story of Peter walking out on the water to meet Jesus. Here is someone who knew that Jesus was the Son of God. He knew this with every fiber of his being and yet when he broke eye contact with Jesus that day he started sinking.

Sometimes we too are like Peter. We believe in Christ with our whole being, but we get distracted by all the things going on around us. These distractions can take our eyes off Christ and cause us to become stagnant in our faith. But what I love the most about this Scripture is how Jesus responds to Peter.

In this moment Jesus could have done a lot of things. He could have let Peter sink a little more to teach him a lesson. Yet immediately when Peter cries for Christ to save him he grabs his hand and pulls him out of the water. So, it is with our faith. When we feel like we may be drowning in grief or uncertainty when we call upon the name of Jesus Christ, God saves us. So, we are called to keep our eyes on Christ, especially during this season in our lives.

Today we are called to remember that God is the constant in our lives that does not change. This is why we can always praise God, in the midst of joy and despair in our lives. We can always worship because God is always good even when we are not.

Church, the good news today is that we do have a new song to sing. A song of grace and hope. A song that God, our leader, will teach us, and write on our hearts. A song that we can sing as our battle cry in times of joy and in sorrow. A song that reinstates Christ as the King in our lives. So, we are called to sing this song to everyone who will hear it.

We sing this new song when we see evidence that God is still doing something new in our lives. Two Sundays ago, our intern, Susan shared with us her “mustard seed moment.” She shared how through her internship this summer that she has been able to discern the direction God is calling her to go. Today we celebrate with Susan that God is calling her to ministry with children and their families.

This is the new song that Susan has been called to sing and we also get to sing along. What is the new song that God is calling you to sing today? It is to give thanks to God for something God has done in the past? Or is it to celebrate the present moment that we find ourselves in?

God continues to call us to worship and trust in God. How will you sing a new song with your life? How will you continue to give God praise when you are unable to sing your favorite hymns?

We know that God will give us a new song to sing, because we have seen this happen before.

More than any other Christian writer, Lee Strobel’s journey of coming to believe in Jesus Christ is much like Peter’s experience walking on water. In this moment Peter had a decision to make to trust in Jesus or to walk away. Strobel had this same decision to make. He was a successful journalist who worked as legal editor at *The Chicago Tribune*.ⁱⁱⁱ He was not interested in learning about God. It was only when his wife became a Christian and he saw a change in her that he was “fascinated by the fundamental changes in her character, her integrity and her personal confidence.”^{iv} This caused him to launch an “all out investigation into the facts surrounding the case for Christianity.”^v In his book: “The Case for Christ: A Journalist’s Personal Investigation on the Evidence for Jesus” Strobel shares:

Setting aside my self-interest and prejudices as best I could, I read books, interviewed experts, asked questions, analyzed history, explored archeology, studied ancient literature, and, for the first time in my life, picked apart the Bible verse by verse. I plunged into the case with more vigor than with any story I had ever pursued. I applied the training I have received at Yale Law School as well as my experience as legal affairs editor of the Chicago Tribune. And over time the evidence of the world—of history, of science, of philosophy, of psychology—began to point to the unthinkable.”^{vi}

Strobel was consumed by the case for Christ and he did not rest until he found the answer, that he did indeed find indisputable evidence that Christ was the Messiah and that God was real. Strobel’s walking on water moment did not happen in one moment, but eventually God called him to use his gifts for God’s glory.

I appreciate Lee Strobel’s witness because he reminds us that you do not have to be a pastor to share the good news of Christ. Strobel focused on his gifts of intellect and love of the law to collect God’s message of good news in an organized fashion.

What is beautiful about Lee Strobel’s call is that it changed his identity from investigator to evangelist. Like Strobel, I pray that God plants within each one of us a passion to know Christ more and the openness to try something new.

I don’t know what the next couple of months will hold for us, but I do know that as long as we trust in God, we will continue to see evidence that God is making all things new. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ The New Interpreter’s Bible. Leander Keck et al. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN, 1996. P. 1064.

ⁱⁱ Ibid, 1065.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://leestrobel.com/about>

^{iv} Lee Strobel. “The Case for Christ.” P. 14.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Ibid.