

## If You Wanna Sing Out, Sing Out - *Psalm 95:1-7*

Norwalk Christian Church, March 15, 2020, Lent 3, Year A, Mixtape - Psalms Series

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Marti and I commented this week: they didn't teach us "Ministry in Times of Pandemic" in seminary. These days are new for us all. We struggled this week with the decision if we should cancel church today, and it's a hard decision, one that we didn't all agree on. Gathering as church during uncertain times is what we do best! We need one another in these moments. But this is real and serious, and our being together actually adds to the threat that we all face.

Our generation has not experienced anything like this, and the experts suggest things will get worse before they get better. Please, church, take precautions and take it seriously. This is serious and we should be serious.

But...but, you showed up for good news. :-) There is truly a lot bad news out there, but the good news comes to us today from the Psalms, one of my favorites, Psalm 95.

Just try to not smile when you hear these words: *O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.*

Sing and make a joyful noise! But let's be honest, it seems a bit naive this morning. Sing and make a joyful noise, even in the midst of a pandemic?!

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Since the early centuries of Christianity, there has been a monastic, ascetic tradition. It began in the desert, with church fathers and mothers fleeing cities and living in isolation in caves and, in at least one case, on top of a tall pole. Talk about social distancing...

Later in Christian history, these monastics ended up forming communities. And every day, they would pray several times a day, together or alone. And every morning they would begin their prayer time by saying, singing, or chanting Psalm 95.

That practice continues today. Daily around the world, Christians pray Psalm 95 in multiple languages. Some are monks or nuns. Others are everyday Christians, inspired by this daily devotion. One and the same they begin every day with these words, "O Come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation."

During the global black plague in the Middle Ages, they prayed, "O Come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation."

During famine, wars, threats of war, genocide, and holocaust, they prayed, "O Come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation."

On 9.11 and during economic crises, they prayed, “O Come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.”

Even this morning, they prayed, “O Come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.”

What would change in our attitudes, our outlook on the world, and our very life if we began every morning, praying, “O Come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation”?

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Throughout Lent, we’ve been looking at the Psalms in our worship series: “Mixtape: the Psalms Greatest Hits”, and track 3 on our Mixtape is the cheerful, upbeat Cat Stevens’ song, “If You Wanna Sing Out, Sing Out.”

I love this song. And I would play it for you this morning, if my phone wasn’t right there videoing this. But I encourage you to google the song and listen to it today. I bet it will make you smile. The lyrics say:

*Well, if you want to sing out, sing out  
 And if you want to be free, be free  
 'Cause there's a million things to be  
 You know that there are  
 And if you want to live high, live high  
 And if you want to live low, live low  
 'Cause there's a million ways to go  
 You know that there are  
 You can do what you want  
 The opportunity's on  
 And if you find a new way  
 You can do it today  
 You can make it all true  
 And you can make it undo  
 You see, ah ah ah, It's easy, ah ah ah  
 You only need to know...*

Cat Stevens says it’s *easy*, it’s easy to sing out if you wanna sing out. But so much in our lives, the world, and our head says it’s so hard. But there is a choice--to sing and make a joyful noise, or not. To live high, or live low. And Cat Stevens, along with the Psalmist, invite us to come, and make the choice to sing.

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To sing and make a joyful noise in the midst of pandemic and economic uncertainty is not naive. Singing and making a joyful noise doesn’t encourage us to be stupid, or risky, to ignore evidence, nor does it mean we ignore suffering and depression and threat.

Singing and making a joyful noise is about an attitude. That's what Cat is singing about, what the Psalmist sings out, that wherever you are, in whatever situation you may be in, you can sing to the Lord, for the Lord is a great God, the great king above all Gods, diseases and every threat.

It doesn't mean that nothing bad will happen--but it does mean that in the midst of the worst of the worst, we can still sing in faith.

Faith, church, is not naivete. Faith is not stupidity. Faith is not ignoring the evidence. Faith is a choice. A choice to believe and to sing even when there's seemingly nothing to believe in or sing about. Faith is a choice to see the good in the midst of trouble. Faith is belief that the world and everything in it are in God's hands, even when we are given cause to doubt this truth.

The faith we've caught, that's been passed on to us from generation to generation, is strong and resilient, able to outlast any threat new or old. And guess what--our faith, it's highly contagious.

As fear and disease spread, it's an opportunity for the church to sing out! "O Come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation."

Don't sing into anyone's face--spreading the germs, mind you. But sing out in faith. Share God's good news, proclaiming the truth, that the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. God's got this, and God's got us.

We are in the midst of Lent, a time when we, traditionally, give up things in order to remind ourselves of our true blessings. This Lent, we are being asked to give up a lot! But may we use this time to focus on what really matters. As we have to give things up, let us take on things that bring joy to our hearts. Spend time with family. Call a friend. Listen to music. Watch your favorite TV shows. Read a book. Go out into your yard. And, by all means, sing out--even if you're alone.

We--each one of us--we are the church. The church isn't a worship service, it's people. And no matter what, we will find ways to be church and community for one another.

So, for the love of God and one another, Wash your hands. Be smart. Stay safe. Sing out. Find joy. Keep the germs at bay, but share our contagious faith. "For God is our God, and we are the people of God's pasture, and the sheep of God's hand.

O that today you would listen to his voice!" O that today and everyday you would sing with joy to the Lord!