

Sing a Song

Luke 1:39-55 NIV

The message for this morning is entitled “Sing a Song” because throughout the years human beings have used singing as a way to connect with the Divine. Music in general has been used as a way to express who we are and also to communicate our experiences of the world. Singing and music could be very liberating and empowering.

Growing up, I spent a lot of time with this friend of mine. We went to the same school. We were in the same class for several years (from kindergarten to 6th grade). We played sports together. And on top of that, we were neighbors, which means we played in the neighborhood as well.

This friend of mine and I spent a lot of time together. Coco (coconut in Spanish) was my friend’s nickname. I don’t know why we called him Coco. I guess we called him that way because he was stubborn and nuts. Nevertheless, coco was a fun guy and a good friend. I said, “he was” because I have not seen him for over 10 years.

The reason I am telling you about coco is because he had a speech impediment. Coco stuttered like no one in this world. And, his problem was worse when he got super excited or super mad.

I remember a bunch of us, kids, getting together to play. In Cuba, playing and arguing goes hand in hand. So, every time we played, we ended up having an argument and in the heat of the argument you could hear everybody, except my good friend Coco. He usually got stuck in the first letter of the word and was not able to speak at all. I remember telling him as a kind of a joke, “Coco, calm down and just sing whatever you want to tell me. Sing it!” He didn’t like that at all. But it was true, Coco did not stutter when he sang.

Most of us do not have a stuttering problem in the physical sense (a speech impediment), but we stutter in other areas of life. A recent study shows that when we are emotionally struggling, we often have a hard time expressing ourselves and living in a healthy rhythm. For those of you who feel like you are stuttering through life, I would say, “Calm down and sing.”

I recognize that not everyone here today may be walking through a desert right now, but that does not mean that you will not in the future. Believe me, I am not trying to frighten anybody. Yet, we know that “deserts” (dry lands, difficult circumstances, stuttering places) are real situations that we encounter all the time.

To those who are going through an illness, a financial crisis, some kind of loss, an unexpected, uncomfortable situation, to those who know somebody who is having a difficult moment, I want to give you the same piece of advice I gave my friend Coco over two decades ago. And I hope you receive it, live it, and share it. Here is the advice, “*Sing your way through life.*” Another way to put it would be, “*sing* it off” like “walk it off.”

Now, let me spend some time explaining what I mean when I say, “Sing your way through life” or what I think means the same, “sing it off.”

If you are familiar with the content of the Bible, you know that singing (praising God) has been of extreme importance for the people of God throughout the ages. The Bible is full of singing. Actually, the longest book in the Bible, the Book of Psalms, has 150 chapters and each chapter is a song.

If you remember, the first thing the Hebrew people did when they supernaturally crossed the Red Sea as if on dry ground was to (worship) sing a song to the Lord. After the Lord gave the Israelites victory over Pharaoh and his army, they sang a song to God. We see the same thing happening in the lives of David, Deborah, Hannah, and others who sang to the Lord as they celebrated their God-given successes.

There is an occasion in the Scriptures when the order given to the Hebrews was to celebrate with music not after the victory but before. Joshua and the Israelites were getting ready to conquer the city of Jericho and the order was to march around the city playing trumpets and shouting at once with all their might. At the sound of their voices the walls came down and the victory became a reality.

In the Bible, we have passages that tell how the people of God worshipped and praised the Lord before and after the victory. Being honest, I think it is way too easy to sing a song after having success. It is way too easy to sing and celebrate when things are going well in our lives. It can be more challenging to sing before the victory, but we'll be likely to sing if we know that our song will make us win.

But what about singing, worshiping, praising God when we are in that moment of transition where we don't have the victory yet and all we see is a path that we would have never chosen for our lives.

Here is where Mary comes to be part of the story this morning. I believe that even though Mary received the news of her unexpected pregnancy with great humility, she also had to deal with the tension that God's plan brought to her life. We appreciate Mary's words, "*I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me according to your word*", but we know that her determination did not exclude her from painful situations. I am sure that the great blessing of being the mother of the Savior came along with a great deal of discomfort.

Today, we read that Mary went from Nazareth to Judea to visit her relative Elizabeth. The Bible does not specify the reasons why Mary went to visit Elizabeth. We can create several theories to explain the 80-mile trip to Judea. Most likely, Mary was wise and realized that she needed help and counsel in this extraordinary situation. Possibly, Mary was eager to talk to a woman who could personally understand her excitement, her wonder, and probably her nervousness; and no one better to talk to than Elizabeth who was also pregnant by God's intervention.

On another note, we could say that Mary understood the implications of a woman in her situation getting pregnant in that culture and time. Death by stoning was a possibility. Perhaps, Mary wanted and needed to get away from Nazareth, which was a very small town where everybody knew everybody's business. Maybe, Mary needed a break from the cruel, insensitive comments

of the people of Nazareth. It is possible that she needed some time to process the news the angel brought to her.

It was in a moment of transition and perhaps tension that Mary went to visit Elizabeth and as soon as she met her relative, Mary intoned: *“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name.”* **Luke 1:46-49 NIV**

Part of **the Christmas message is that we should praise God always**. Think about it! A host of angels appeared to the shepherds singing and giving all glory to God. Elizabeth sang! Zechariah sang! Mary sang! The message of Christmas calls us to sing a song of praise to God, to be people who worship in spirit and in truth, who praise the Lord always, who sing songs of praises even when the events of our lives are not favorable.

You don't need to have a melodious voice to sing, to give praises to the Lord. Some of you may be thinking, “You don't want to hear me singing at all.” This is what a bad singer once told me, “When I am sad, I sing, and then, others are sad with me” (joke).

The truth is that we don't know how good of a singer Mary was. We don't know if she belonged to her “church's (synagogue's) choir” or to the Nazareth Orchestra. What we know is that Mary sang and worshipped the Lord in a moment of tension and transition. This teaches us that we don't need the voice of an angel to sing and give praises to God. We just need a willing heart and a determined spirit.

I want us to understand that singing is more than making nice sounds. Singing a song sometimes takes the form of a word of encouragement. I see Elizabeth, Mary's relative, singing a song as she welcomed Mary. *“In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!”* (**Luke 1:42 NIV**). Again, we don't know if Elizabeth spoke, chanted, or rapped these words. What we know is that Elizabeth's welcoming sounded like music to the ears of Mary.

Church, your words, full of grace and seasoned with love, can be music to the ears of people who need an encouraging word from God. A kind speech can prompt others to praise the Lord just like Elizabeth's greeting inspired Mary to sing a song.

Singing can be a channel to express our emotions, but it can also be the means that will carry us through difficult moments if we use our voices to praise God. Mary received the shocking news that she was pregnant when she was without a husband (not very good news in that social context). Regardless, Mary sang praises to God. Her example invites us to never stop singing melodies of gratefulness to God for the things he has done, he is doing and will bring to fruition. So, I encourage you to say: *“Lord, tune my heart to sing thy grace; Teach me some melodious sonnet, sung by flaming tongues above. Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it, mount of thy redeeming love.”*

May this Christmas initiate a never-ending season of praising God in and with your life. Be inspired and sing a song.