



Profound Disorientation to Radical Reorientation

A Three-Part Worship Series with the Psalms

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The realities of COVID-19 have been profoundly disorienting. The new disease has run rampant, sickening and killing many. The grief has been compounded by social restrictions, with family and friends not able to gather to mourn together. Others have lost their jobs or faced the gut-wrenching decisions to lay off employees or even shutter their business; food pantries have faced unprecedented demand. Cell phone videos have provided a window into the violence committed against African Americans and people from other marginalized groups, often from members of law enforcement. Our context seems so far removed from the comprehensive shalom we dream of and pray for.

Yet even in this context, we are called to worship. We *need* to worship: to be reminded of God's presence with us at all times, to lament the losses and give thanks for daily mercies, to seek God's kingdom where everything wrong will be made right, to offer praise and renew our hope and trust in God.

That's a lot to expect from our Sunday worship! But how else are we to move from our settled past through the confusion of the pandemic into our still-unfolding new reality? How else are we to take that journey but with God and with one another? To assist pastors and churches along the way, this three-part worship series follows the arc of the Psalms from orientation to disorientation to reorientation. We hope you'll find this a useful guide in planning worship as we come before God with our experience before COVID and during the chaos of the pandemic, and as we find a new way forward.

BACKGROUND TO THE PSALMS

Though we often see the Bible as a source of inspiration, guidance, and comfort, we forget that both Old Testament and New arose in contexts of profound disorientation. The sacking of Jerusalem, destruction of the temple, and forced captivity shattered the Israelites' expectations. Before exile in Babylon, the Israelites believed that they would be safe and Jerusalem was untouchable because the Lord was with them;



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this calamity forced them to reconsider this theological pillar and to take greater account of the broader world.

For followers of Jesus, watching their beloved leader and teacher torturously hang from a Roman cross was a profound shock (the road to Emmaus story in Luke 24 attests to their disorientation). Making sense of Jesus' death and resurrection prompted a fundamental rethinking of the nature of the Messiah, from one who would conquer (Psalms 2, 18)¹ to one who suffered (Psalm 22). For both Israelites and followers of Jesus, the jolt of radical disorientation prompted a profound transformation, providing the seeds of what became the Jewish and Christian traditions.

The book of Psalms presents a microcosm of this dynamic. Like other wisdom and torah (instruction) psalms, Psalm 1 sets out an optimistic orientation where the righteous prosper and the wicked blow away like chaff in the wind. This confidence quickly unravels, as a series of laments starting in Psalm 3 cry out from situations of distress. Though they often receive little attention in our corporate worship, these psalms that

1. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the NRSV.

insist that “things are not right” (Brueggemann) and something needs to change prove to be the most numerous, with over 50 individual laments alone.

The repeated expression of lament dominates books 1–3 of the Psalms (Psalms 1–89), climaxing with the utter disorientation of personal anguish (Psalm 88) and the end of the Davidic monarchy and exile (Psalm 89:38–52). Book 4 then provides a radical reorientation, insisting that the Israelites should depend not on a human king but on their divine one: “the *Lord* is king” (Psalms 93, 95–99).

While the militaristic overtones and role that judgment plays in that image may cause some discomfort, the conviction that the Lord is king proves foundational to the Gospels too. For instance, recall the wording of the Lord’s Prayer in the Sermon on the Mount (“*Your* kingdom come. Your will be done,” Matthew 6:10); the constant reference to the “kingdom of God” in the Gospels, including Jesus’ parables; even the Lord’s Supper, which builds on Jesus’ celebration of the Passover (and so God’s revelation in the exodus!) with his disciples. Facing yet another foreign empire, this time the Romans, Jesus and his followers dared to claim that *God* was king—and *not* Caesar!

We are not alone. This is not the first time that the world seems to have shifted; where former perspectives, commitments, and practices have been challenged; when people have felt traumatized and disoriented. What is the “new song” that we are called to sing?

As Jesus said, “every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (Matthew 13:52). As those tasked with sharing the gospel in this strange new world, I hope this series helps you rediscover and draw from the treasure of Scripture in your own time and place.

Note: For relevant and engaging work on the Psalms, I highly recommend Walter Brueggemann. He is a brilliant Old Testament scholar committed to discerning the Bible’s theological message for the church, and his *Spirituality of the Psalms* and *Psalms and the Life of Faith* are both excellent resources. For studies that explore each psalm in turn, see commentaries by Brueggemann (New Cambridge), James Luther Mays (Interpretation), and James Waltner (BCBC).

HOW THIS SERIES IS ORGANIZED

Three psalms were selected for this worship series:

- Psalm 1: “Planted in Good Ground,” a psalm of orientation to reflect on our life and faith before COVID-19.
- Psalm 13: “How Long?” a psalm of lament and disorientation to express the disorientation of the pandemic.
- Psalm 98: “Singing a New Song,” a psalm of reorientation to accompany us into the future.

For each Sunday, this resource includes a focus statement and visual elements, song suggestions and a prayer from *Voices Together*, a call to worship, words of confession and assurance, children’s time, sermon notes on the psalm, a ritual act of worship, and a benediction.

Visual elements

Psalm 1:3 describes “a tree planted by streams of water,” and this will serve as a visual focus for the series, with unique elements added for each Sunday.

Begin by arranging bare branches in a large vase to serve as a “tree” in your worship space. Set it on a table covered with a deep brown cloth to represent the good ground where the tree grows and to symbolize the stability and security of the past and of our faith in God. Add a strip of blue fabric or a wide blue ribbon to represent the river. Please see the outline for each Sunday for the unique elements to add each week.



Sherah-Leigh Gerber

Rituals

For each Sunday, this resource includes a suggested ritual to engage the body in worship along with heart, mind, and soul. But the ritual changes from week to week, and appears at a different point in each service.

On the first Sunday, a gathering ritual welcomes everyone back to corporate worship. On the second Sunday, a ritual of silence honors those who lost their lives to COVID-19 and those who have served sacrificially to care for others, and allows space to mourn the many other losses of the pandemic. On the third Sunday, a sending ritual concludes the series.

Children’s time

The children’s time for each Sunday focuses on praying with the children, but the prayers are also well suited for intergenerational participation. On the first Sunday, everyone in the congregation can learn to pray the Lord’s Prayer with actions. On the second Sunday, everyone in the congregation could be given a button for the button prayer. On the third Sunday, everyone in the congregation could use a small instrument, clap, or snap their fingers. So while these prayers are listed for the children’s time, feel free to include the whole congregation in your preparation and as you lead in prayer.

Psalm 1

Planted in Good Ground

Scripture

Psalm 1

Focus

As we consider life before COVID-19, in what ways were we rooted in the good ground of faith and in God's Word? In what ways did we flourish and experience God's blessing?

Visual elements

Set up the worship display with a large vase of bare branches as described in the overview, and leave it in place for this series. For this first Sunday, cut out leaves from green construction paper, and punch a hole in each one so it can be hung on one of the tree branches during the gathering ritual. Make enough leaves for everyone in the congregation, and scatter them across the tablecloth along with a few markers. Or for a less labor-intensive approach, purchase pre-strung merchandise tags that can be hung on the branches.

Song suggestions

Voices Together

In addition to these song suggestions, consider singing favorites from the life of your congregation before COVID as a reminder of the good ground of your faith.

Songs of seeds and trees:

- 98 Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise
- 297 You Are Salt for the Earth
- 514 I Saw a Tree by the Riverside
- 550 God Who Touches Earth with Beauty

Songs of God's Word:

- 197 God's Glory Fills the Heavens
- 204 Praise to the Living God
- 398 Thy Word Is a Lamp
- 571 O God, We Read the Holy Law
- 592 How Firm a Foundation

Songs of God's leading:

- 124 For the Fruit of All Creation
- 533 Quietly, Peacefully
- 570 When We Walk with the Lord
- 793 Siyahamba (We Are Marching)
- 815 Sizohamba naye (We Will Walk with God)

Call to worship

- One: Come worship the God of creation who has planted us like a tree in good ground.
Many: We worship the God who has grounded us in faith and in the Word.
One: Come worship the God who is with us in Jesus Christ, the Word of God who has saved us.
Many: We worship the God who continues to save us in the storms of life.
One: Come worship the God who tenderly watches over us and sustains us by the Spirit.
Many: We worship the God who guards us from danger and guides our way.
All: All praise and thanks to God!



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Gathering ritual

As people gather for worship, invite them to write their name on a leaf or tag and hang it on the tree. This may be done before the service begins as people enter the worship space. Or immediately after the call to worship, invite people to come forward during a time of instrumental music or congregational singing. The tree with all the names is a visual representation of the church planted in faith and in God's Word. Leave the tree with the name tags as the visual display for the rest of the series.

Prayer

Voices Together 869 is a responsive reading for gathering as a covenant people. Its affirmation of being “renamed, reborn, renewed” seems especially appropriate for when churches are able to resume worship together in person.

Confession and assurance

All: *We confess that God has planted us to be the church in this time and place, yet how often we have failed to live into our calling. Instead of delighting in God's Word, we have been distracted by the things of this world. Instead of remaining grounded and flourishing to bear good fruit, we have been pulled in many different directions. Instead of seeking God's path for us, we have gone our own way. Forgive us, Lord, watch over us, guide us, and grant us the courage to follow you.*

One: Hear now these words of assurance from Hebrews 4:15-16: “We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

As we have now made our confession, let us receive God's forgiveness and mercy. By God's grace, may we live as forgiven people and walk the path of faith that God has set before us. May we flourish and bear good fruit in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Children's time: The Lord's Prayer with actions

Prepare

The Lord's Prayer is an ancient prayer, grounded in the past and in God's Word, first taught by Jesus, recorded in the gospel of Matthew, and prayed for centuries in many places and in many languages. Learn the Lord's Prayer with actions, and practice until you are able to pray it without referring to notes or to the video (<https://youtu.be/SkR6icVDwtA>). If your church regularly prays the Lord's Prayer by saying “holy” instead of “hallowed” or “your name” instead of “thy name,” or with other changes, feel free to adjust the wording as needed. If you and the children already know the Lord's Prayer with different actions, feel free to use the actions that are already familiar to you.

Share

Introduce the Lord's Prayer by telling the children that when Jesus' followers asked him to teach them to pray, Jesus taught them a special prayer that's been prayed in many places and in many languages. Invite them to join you in praying the Lord's Prayer with actions. If this is new to the children, encourage them to watch once, then join in on the second time. Pray the prayer with actions for a third time as you feel led.

Pray

Lead the children in the Lord's Prayer with actions.

Sermon seeds

Psalm 1 begins the book with an optimistic tone, moving from a negative counter-example to a positive depiction of one who follows divine instruction. The psalmist is confident that God's favor rests on the “righteous,” and does not extend to the “wicked.”

Often obscured in translation, the verbs of the opening verse suggest increased permanence. The psalmist warns not to *walk* with the wicked, *stand* with sinners, or *sit* (even “dwell”) with scoffers. The next verses shift to a positive depiction of someone who “delights in the law of the Lord.” This wording provides a delicious ambiguity, since “*torah* of the Lord” can refer to either Scripture itself (cf. Ezra 7:10; study the Bible, everyone!) or God's “instruction” more generally—or both. While the exact referent is ambiguous, the effort involved is not. Where the negative counter-example becomes more and more static (walk, stand, sit), the psalm seeks ongoing effort and constant commitment, where “delight” translates into meditating “day and night.”

The psalm's literary artistry continues with the metaphor of a tree that merges with the positive depiction of one committed to God's instruction. The wordplay here is wonderful, since both humans and trees can “flourish” (prosper) in the Old Testament. The

tree image proves powerful for those in an arid climate. This image also reflects wisdom terminology, and may even allude to a “tree of life” that appears briefly in Genesis and prominently elsewhere in ancient Near Eastern literature and iconography.

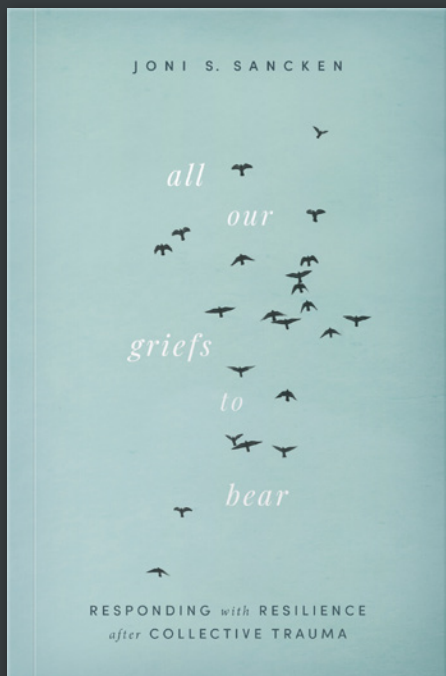
The psalm ends with the contrast of the two ways; both the term *way* and the contrast between the “righteous” and the “wicked” prove characteristic of wisdom material. The “wicked” are short-lived, while God watches over the “righteous.”

For someone unaware of the book to come, this psalm could easily be cited in support of “prosperity theology,” where one’s success or even bank balance reflects signs of God’s blessing.

Benediction

Planted in faith and grounded in God’s Word, receive these words of blessing from Numbers 6:24-26:

“The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.” Amen.



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How Long?

Scripture

Psalm 13

Focus

As we consider life during the pandemic, how has that been a hard time for us personally and as a church? What and who have we lost? How have we grown in trust and confidence before God?

Visual elements

Collect large rocks to represent the hard experiences during the pandemic: the serious illness and loss of life, the loss of jobs and businesses, the challenges of schooling, the restrictions that kept some families crowded together at home and others isolated and alone, the toll on mental health, the racial violence and other ongoing injustices, the uncertainty and worry. Add the rocks to the worship display, and leave them there for the rest of the series.

Song suggestions

Voices Together

Songs of lament:

- 140 Out of the Depths I Cry to You
- 623 What Comfort Can Our Worship Bring
- 691 How Long, O Lord
- 692 Kyrie eleison
- 694 Tears of Suffering

Songs of God's grace:

- 167 Your Grace Is Enough
- 682 Lord, Listen to Your Children
- 693 Khudaya, rahem kar (Have Mercy on Us, Lord)
- 703 Rain Down

Songs of trust in God:

- 419 Great Is Thy Faithfulness
- 564 What Wondrous Love Is This
- 588 We Walk by Faith
- 621 My Hope Is Built

Call to worship

One: Come gather to worship the God of steadfast love and generous mercy, who hears us when we call.

Many: **We come with our questions, with our sorrows and joys. We come in faith that God is here and hears us.**

One: Come gather to worship the God who accomplished our salvation in Jesus Christ, who lived and died and rose again and now reigns over all.

Many: **We come, depending on Jesus who has borne the penalty of sin and death, depending on the Spirit who sighs with us in our sorrows.**

One: Come gather to worship the God who holds us close, who offers comfort and healing, who is our rock and refuge in times of trouble.

Many: **We come with joy even in the midst of trial, for God is love and light and life.**

All: *All praise and thanks to God!*



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Prayer

Voices Together 1044, “Response to Community Crisis,” names doubt, fear, anger, and other responses that may have surfaced for us during the pandemic and ends with a prayer for God “to guide our feet in the way of peace.”

Ritual of silence

Introduce this time of silence by inviting everyone to reflect on the pandemic in light of Psalm 13. What questions do they have for God? What pain and sorrow do they carry? What names are missing from the tree in the worship display? What sacrifices have people made to serve others during this time of pandemic? Invite those who are able to stand for a moment of silent reflection, with hands extended palms up to offer their lament to God, or folded together in prayer.

To end the silence, read *Voices Together* 728. These excerpts from Psalm 13 may be read responsively as printed, or may be read by a single voice either from the front or from the midst of the congregation.

Confession and assurance

All: *We confess that God is love and is ever present with us, yet how often we forget and feel forgotten and alone. We act as if God is hiding from us—when we are the ones who have turned away. We act as if we must bear the pain and sorrow of this world on our own—when God in Jesus Christ has already shouldered our burdens and invites us to come and rest. Forgive us, Lord, for our fear and worry. Forgive us for the part that we have played in the racism and injustice of our world. Remind us that you prevail over every sin, over every injustice, over every wrong that needs to be made right.*

One: Hear now these words of assurance from Romans 8:1-2: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.”

As we have now made our confession, let us receive God’s forgiveness and freedom. For if God has set us free, we are free indeed! So let us live according to the Spirit, confident of God’s steadfast love even amid questions and uncertainty, renewed in our commitment to love kindness and do justice. May we walk in faith, love like Jesus, and hold on to hope. Amen.

Children’s time: Button prayer

Prepare

Psalm 13 is a psalm of lament that expresses both sorrow and trust in God. “How long?” asks the psalmist. Think of a time during the pandemic when you asked “How long?” that you could share with the children (e.g., How long before schools would have regular classes again? How long before everyone could come to church?). What were some of the hard things and some of the more encouraging things that happened during the pandemic? Gather buttons of different sizes, shapes, and colors, enough to give each older child a button to hold during the prayer time. For younger children, cut cardboard button shapes of different colors, complete with one or more holes in the center of each cardboard button.

Share

Read Psalm 13:2 to the children: “How long will sorrow fill my heart?”. Share briefly with the children your own experience of asking “How long?” Let them know that when we are sad, we can share our sad feelings with God. When we are happy, we can share our happy feelings. Whatever we feel, we can trust God. Then hand out the buttons, and invite the children to hold them and join you in a button prayer.

Pray

Lead the children in the following prayer, inspired by the Flame Creative Kids button prayers².

Let’s all feel how hard our button is. While you do so, think of some of the hard things that make us sad, like people getting sick and missing our friends.

(Pause briefly.)

God, hear the cry of our hearts, and hold our sad feelings.

Buttons can hold clothes together to keep us warm, like the buttons on a sweater. Let’s think about people coming together for worship and coming together to help each other.

(Pause briefly.)

2. See <http://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/2017/07/button-prayers.html>

God, bless our families and friends, our church family and our neighbors. Help all those who are hurting, people who are near to us and people around the world.

Look at the number of holes in your button. Think of that many things that you can thank God for.

(Pause briefly.)

Thank you, God, for all your gifts: for creating the world and everything in it, for food and fresh air, for water and trees, for our homes.

God, we trust you with all our feelings: sad, happy, thankful. We trust you even when we're not sure how we feel, because you always love us. Amen.

Thank the children for praying with you, and either collect all the buttons or encourage the children to take them home as a reminder to pray.

Sermon seeds

Psalms 13 builds on a characteristic question that underlies lament: “How long?” Immediately repeated four times, this question epitomizes a situation where things are simply not right, a situation from which the psalmist pleads for a dramatic shift. The sense of abandonment is palpable; the traumatic sense that God has forgotten the psalmist or is hiding from her echoes Jesus’ psalmic cry from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). Along with illness (Psalm 6), the sense of being surrounded by enemies (and malicious speech) reflects a dominant concern in laments.

Often translated as “soul,” the Hebrew term *nephesh* denotes one’s entire self or being (v. 2), *not* the body/soul dualism we often associate with the English term. Similarly, having “sorrow in my *heart*” may not reflect an emotional concern but a cognitive one, since “heart” (Heb. *lebab*) represents the place of the will and is regularly employed for thought processes or decision-making (cf. Solomon asking for an “understanding *heart*” in 1 Kings 3). The psalmist is not immune to the ruminating thoughts and catastrophic thinking prompted by pain and abandonment.

After describing the negative situation, the psalmist employs a series of imperatives, asking God to act in forceful language: Consider! Answer me! Give light to my eyes! Perhaps strange to us, laments commonly insist that helping the petitioner poses a benefit for God too: with no intervention, what will the enemies think? These psalms do not just list issues, but seek to convince and compel God to act.

As is common in laments, the end of the psalm reflects confidence in God. In contrast to the enemies who rejoice in her calamity, the psalmist trusts in God’s “steadfast love” (*hesed*) and expects “salvation” or “deliverance” (*yeshuah*)—like *nephesh*, the latter term does not distinguish between spiritual and physical well-being, but instead implies both. While the situation hasn’t changed, expressing herself to God has already reoriented the psalmist’s perspective.

Benediction

May the steadfast love of God
guide your path in the week ahead.
May the sure presence of Jesus
be your comfort and joy every step of the way.
May the Spirit see you through every challenge,
and grant blessed rest at the end of every day. Amen.

Singing a New Song

Scripture

Psalm 98

Focus

As we consider life post-COVID, what do we hope for? How will we seek God's righteousness and reign as we enter into a new reality? What new song will we sing?

Visual elements

Gather together some small flowering plants to represent new life, freshness, and hope. Add the flowers to the worship display under the tree and among the rocks. Even in times of hardship, there is hope, for God is at work bringing new life. Consider leaving the worship display in place for several Sundays after this series as a celebration of God's work in the life of your church.

Song suggestions

Voices Together

Songs of God's goodness:

- 33 You Are Good
- 66 Alleluia/Make a Joyful Noise (Psalm 100)
- 70 Praise God (Dedication Anthem)
- 76 Holy, Holy, Holy!
- 177 All Things Bright and Beautiful
- 747 We Plow the Fields and Scatter

Songs of joy:

- 80 We Sing to You, O God
- 93 Nyanyikanlah nyanyian baru (Sing to God a New Song)
- 113 Cantai ao Senhor (O Sing to the Lord)
- 240 Joy to the World
- 611 Lift Every Voice and Sing
- 847 You Shall Go Out with Joy

Call to worship

- One: Come sing a new song of God's steadfast love and faithfulness.
- Many: **We sing our joy and gratitude for all the good things that God has done!**
- One: Come sing a new song with sea and earth, with rivers and hills, with all creation longing to be made new.
- Many: **We sing God's reign and righteousness, already but not yet in our beautiful and broken world, already and coming soon in the fullness of time.**
- One: Come sing a new song of God's saving power and victory, a song of love and faith and hope for all God's promises.
- Many: **We sing with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, for God's steadfast love and faithfulness.**
- All: **All praise and thanks to God!**

Prayer

Voices Together 963, "For Congregational Transitions and Anniversaries," is a responsive reading that also speaks to this post-COVID transition. It expresses gratitude for God's leading in the past with a prayer for God to "open us to the future you promise."



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Confession and assurance

All: *We confess that God is righteous and has already won the victory, yet how often we take matters into our own hands and fail to trust God. Instead of joining creation in praise, we have too often done harm to the earth and its creatures. Instead of respecting others, we have too often failed to recognize them as made in the image of God. Forgive us, Lord, for our hard-heartedness and willfulness. Create in us a new resolve to follow you in doing what is right.*

One: Hear now these words of assurance from Ephesians 2:8-10: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”

As we have now made our confession, let us receive God’s gift of forgiveness and grace. May we sing a new song of God’s goodness in the way we live each day. May we live the life that God has prepared for us, a life of humility and good works. Amen.

Children’s time: Make a joyful noise prayer

Prepare

Psalm 98 begins with the affirmation that God has done wonderful things. Think of some of the wonderful things you are thankful for that you could share with the children (e.g., God’s love, sunshine, a fun family time). Gather together shakers, wooden blocks, triangles, and other small instruments, enough so that each child will have one to use during the children’s time. Keep a shaker for yourself to lead the prayer, and be prepared to use your free hand for a sweeping gesture to signal when to still all the instruments.

Share

Read Psalm 98:1 to the children, and share briefly with them one wonderful thing that God has done. Ask the children to think about the wonderful things in their life, and invite them to share. Then ask them to join you in a joyful noise prayer to give thanks for all these things. Hand out the instruments, and tell them you will let them know when to make some noise. Show them the gesture you will make to signal when to stop.

Pray

Lead the children in the following prayer, with wording from the New Revised Standard Version and the Good News Translation.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth,
let’s everyone make some noise! (*Make noise for a time, then gesture to stop.*)

Sing praises to the Lord with bells and shakers
and whatever else we hold in our hands.

Let’s everyone make some noise! (*Make noise, then gesture to stop.*)

Roar, sea, and every creature in you;
sing, earth, and all who live on you!

That means all of us here,
so let’s everyone make some noise! (*Make noise, then gesture to stop.*)

For God loves us and does wonderful things: _____ (*briefly list the things you and the children shared before the prayer.*)
Amen.

Thank the children for praying with you, and collect all the instruments.

Sermon seeds

The context of exile underscored at the end of Psalm 89 (see section “Background to the Psalms”) raised basic questions: Where do we go from here? Where does hope lie? Psalm 98 signals the need for a “new song” (note parallel in Isaiah 42:10). Rather than celebrate the victory of a human king (Psalm 18), Psalm 98 employs language from the exodus (right hand; holy arm; in sight of the nations) to extol the Lord. The psalmist also redeploys the two key words from Psalm 89 to speak of God’s commitment to the people rather than the king: “He has remembered his *steadfast love* and *faithfulness* to the house of Israel” (v. 3).

Psalm 98 invites the people and all of creation to celebrate the Lord as king, including God’s role as judge; God’s character ensures this judgment is just and upright. Where we often link “righteousness” with personal piety and “justice” with social action, the term *tsedeq* breaks down this dualistic perspective (neither translation encompasses its full meaning).

Similarly, “victory” (*yeshuah*; vv. 1, 2, 3) refuses to split social and spiritual realities, and can also be translated as “salvation” or “deliverance.” Was the exodus liberation from physical slavery? Yes! Was it freedom from spiritual bondage? Of course! (Note: the name Jesus also derives from this term!)

Faced with the profound crisis and disorientation of exile, Psalm 98 calls the community to reclaim a key perspective that sees the *Lord* as the king who delivers/saves Israel and sits as a trustworthy judge. As Moses admonished the people while Pharaoh's army charged against them: "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the *deliverance* [*yeshuah*] that the Lord will accomplish for you today. *The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still*" (Exodus 14:13-14).

The temptation to adopt a nationalistic theology, trust in military might, and give ultimate allegiance to a human leader has never gone away. But hope in the Psalms—and today—lies in our trust in the Lord, our refuge and our king.

Sending ritual

Instead of printing out or projecting this litany, ask the congregation to repeat each line after you with the same rhythm and including the claps. Say the words rhythmically, getting louder with each verse.

- One: Sing praise (*clap once*)
Many: Sing praise (*clap*)
One: Sing justice (*clap, clap, slowly and deliberately*)
Many: Sing justice (*clap, clap*)
One: Sing vic-to-ry (*clap, clap-clap, the second and third claps quick and closer together*)
Many: Sing vic-to-ry (*clap, clap-clap*)
One: Clap praise (*clap once*)
Many: Clap praise (*clap*)
One: Clap justice (*clap, clap, slowly and deliberately*)
Many: Clap justice (*clap, clap*)
One: Clap vic-to-ry (*clap, clap-clap, the second and third claps quick and closer together*)
Many: Clap vic-to-ry (*clap, clap-clap*)
One: Shout praise (*clap once*)
Many: Shout praise (*clap*)
One: Shout justice (*clap, clap, slowly and deliberately*)
Many: Shout justice (*clap, clap*)
One: Shout vic-to-ry (*clap, clap-clap, the second and third claps quick and closer together*)
Many: Shout vic-to-ry (*clap, clap-clap*)

Benediction

And now as we have clapped and shouted together, may we leave this place to live out God's praise and justice and victory. May we move forward in faith, hope, and love, with Jesus as our guide and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Amen.



April Yamasaki is a writer and pastor, currently resident author with a liturgical worship community, and a frequent guest speaker in churches and other settings. Her books include *Four Gifts: Seeking Self-Care for Heart, Soul, Mind, and Strength*; *Sacred*

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