



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aaKf6P2nhKg>

The Harlem Gospel Choir

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K48-Li7lIfA>

The Gospel in 4 Minutes by Sho Baraka

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBzWgVehUk4>

Unashamed Mime Troupe

CHOIR AND WORSHIP ARTS DAY

LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

Sunday, August 12, 2012

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Lection – Psalm 71:12–24 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 12) Do not be far from me, my God; come quickly, God, to help me. (v. 13) May my accusers perish in shame; may those who want to harm me be covered with scorn and disgrace. (v. 14) As for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more. (v. 15) My mouth will tell of your righteous deeds, of your saving acts all day long—though I know not how to relate them all. (v. 16) I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, Sovereign LORD; I will proclaim your righteous deeds, yours alone. (v. 17) Since my youth, God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. (v. 18) Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come. (v. 19) Your righteousness, God, reaches to the heavens, you who have done great things. Who is like you, God? (v. 20) Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up. (v. 21) You will increase my honor and comfort me once more. (v. 22) I will praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, my God; I will sing praise to you with the lyre, Holy One of Israel. (v. 23) My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to you—I whom you have delivered. (v. 24) My tongue will tell of your righteous acts all day long, for those who wanted to harm me have been put to shame and confusion.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

Congregations, pastors, and church staff set aside a day to thank and honor those who contribute to the worship service in song, dance, drama, drill, spoken word, rap, and mime, as well as those who beautify our spaces with tapestry, banners, painting, drawing, sculpture, and other visual arts. Those of us who serve in these capacities are blessed with a day to push the envelope—a day when we can share the manifestation of God’s latest inspirations in us. The Choir and Worship Arts Day celebrates the freedom of embodiment and expression! It recovers and integrates diverse traditions of the African Diaspora as a way to give thanks for the freedom to gather—a freedom that our ancestors did not have.

Further, Choir and Worship Arts Day is a time to honor the evolution of expression. Spirituals emerged from one context of experience; jazz, from another; collage, quilting, “stepping” (both kinds!), modern dance, and arts (beyond what I can name) are all glimpses into the faith journey of those who came before.

II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: Psalm 71:12-24

Part One: The Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter

I write in the third year of economic downturn for most families. I write in a time of technological advance, yet we struggle with educating our youth. I write in a time focused on sustainable living, yet most homes produce waste that belies our claims to reduce materialism and consumerism and to be better steward God’s creation. I write during the liturgically dynamic season of Christmas, Kwanzaa, and Hanukkah. This very week, within walkable miles of my home and my church, two teenagers, a policeman, a father, an uncle, and a young child have been fatally shot. And soon, to ring in the New Year, sounds of “celebratory” gunfire will fill the air.

We live in a time crying out for constructive ways to release joy, pain, anger, loss, hurt, loneliness, desperation, and hope. We experience and need ways to express both the arduous attack as well as the divine defense to which our psalmist bears witness.

Part Two: Biblical Commentary

Psalms are written as poetry and song. They are created for use in faith practices of both celebration and lament. It is their task to express the God encounter. Here in Psalm 71, we hear of God’s presence for our poet in the midst of those who set out to do harm. This wrong intention of the enemies is consistent throughout the text. In verse 11, right before our lectionary reading, we hear that “They say, God has forsaken him; pursue him and seize him, for no one will rescue him.”

We see this today in our own lives and in our media: the exclusive and elusive enemy “they” claims to know whom God loves and does not love, whom God protects and whom God has abandoned. They claim to know God’s mind and they set limits on God’s grace. These enemies expose themselves as predatory, seeking to attack those whom they believe are vulnerable, lack agency, and lack advocates. Today’s enemies believe that no one will rescue our children from violence and poverty. Today’s enemies believe that no one will rescue those without health care or employment. Today’s enemies believe that no one will rescue those who have been locked out of church doors because of under-education, mis-education, self-medication, incarceration, and marginalization.

They do not know that we respond by singing “Tell it All,” “Shout to the Lord,” and “None Like You,” all of which are echoed in this lection. Then, we go and demonstrate, educate, and liberate.

The gift of worship arts is a God-given resource to combat demonic forces and assault on our community and our personhood. Like the many strategies that this poet, elder, singer, activist in our text exercises in order to encourage his community and testify about God’s activity, worship arts allow each child of God to tell the story *and learn the story* in his or her own way, according to our needs. Our diverse praise honors the ways in which we are each unique creations, unique learners, uniquely-abled to fill God’s purpose for our lives. Witnessing song in one, and painting in another, and poetry in someone else helps us to combat the devaluing of difference. Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal asserted in his seminal work, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, “theater . . . is a rehearsal of revolution!”¹ Worship arts help us steward the liberation story of the gospel of Jesus Christ. With our worship arts, we enact Communion as Christ asked us to do in remembrance of our salvation. We enact the joy of Christmas, we enact the Redemption of Easter, all to honor what God had done as well as to imagine what God has yet to do.

Worship arts allow us to remember, record, and re-tell our history. The poet here exemplifies what the prophet Joel challenges in 1:2-3: “Hear this, you elders; listen all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your ancestors? Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation.” The psalmist in our text moves through lament, hope, and thanksgiving, offering a complete story of how God is present in persecution. Here we also lift how telling our story and giving our testimony is an opportunity to bless and encourage someone else who is going through the storms of life.

David, to whom scholars attribute many of the Psalms, knew from his own ‘storm’ experience with Saul just how important it was for worship arts to help steward our emotions and our ability to experience empathy and love for others by embodying the God encounter. David was hired as a musician to help Saul regulate and calm the rage that possessed him. David himself danced, sang, composed, and wailed through the mountain highs and valley lows of victory and loss. Today, we have the blessing to offer tools and space to welcome the many who need the language and liberation of praise and lament. Like David, we can use the tool of stringed instruments (v. 22), the tool of song (v. 23), and the tool of testimony (v. 24). May our gifts of creativity allow everyone to enter the dialogue, spaces of worship, and the presence of the Presence.

Celebration

God protects and provides in so many glorious ways that we will exhaust every possible medium of expression to tell about it. We will lift our own spoken words, lift our feet in dance, lift our voices in song, and lift our instruments and our minds and bodies in worship. The rocks will never cry out in our place!

Descriptive Details

The descriptive details of this passage include:

Sounds: We hear the lamenting voice as well as the voice elated with sounds of joy. We can imagine the whispered voice of the speaker, wavering with the weight of memory and struggle. The voice then recovers, is strengthened, shouts, and sings.

Sights: The Psalmist never uses the word “mountaintop,” yet the promises of *proclaiming* and *declaring* God’s mercy and grace conjure images of the speaker stepping up on platforms, mountains, rocks, or simply standing in a town square—any location where multitudes of folk will hear all that God has done.

Smells: The freshness of air, of plant life—flowers and leaves, as God brings the psalmist up from the depths of the earth (v. 20).

III. Other Information That Preachers and Others Can Use

- www.godtube.com—A Christian “Youtube-like” site. Many ministries post videos of their worship arts here, and it is a wonderful visual and aural resource for ideas. While many ministries also post on www.Youtube.com, if you work with young people or parents concerned about social media, this site may be more acceptable.
- www.karitos.com—A Mid-western worship arts conference, Karitos includes diverse Christian artists among its conference faculty in areas that include, film, theatre, dance, voice, mime, writing, and visual arts.

Note

1. Boal, Augusto. Theatre of the Oppressed. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985. p. 155.