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<sup>1</sup> O sing to the LORD a new song, for He has done marvellous things.

<sup>4</sup> Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;  
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

Psalm 98:1,4

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Joni Erickson Tada (b.1949) had a terrible accident (1967) that left her a quadriplegic. In spite of her physical limitations she became an accomplished author and artist. Over 35 years ago (in 1982) she married her husband, Ken. For her wedding she had planned to come down the centre aisle in her motorised wheel chair. Just before her grand entrance she noticed two distressing problems. First, she had rolled over her beautiful gown and made a big grease spot and tear in it. Then, the flowers in her lap had slipped and had lodged between her leg and the chair. She was filled with disappointment, and then suddenly the doors to the auditorium opened, and she saw her husband to be.

Here was the man who was committing his love and his life to her. Joni later said, "Once I saw Ken's face, all I could think of was him. Everything else—the people in the church, the flowers that were sitting a little askew on my lap, the fact that my dress didn't fall right because I was sitting in a wheelchair, the grease marks, the rip in my gown all of it paled in comparison."

Our 'perspective' or approach to life' (or certain events) will affect our 'response' to them.

In our Psalm for today we are called upon to 'sing praises to the LORD.

Some Background: Psalm 98 is one of seven psalms in the Bible that were used at a festival to celebrate God as King: 47; 93; 95; 96; 97; 98; 99. Many of these psalms contain the cry, "The Lord is king" (see 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1).

Regarding the phrase 'Sing to the Lord a new song': The idea of a new song is found in many places in Scripture (Psalms 33:3, 40:3, 96:1, 144:9 and 149:1; Isaiah 42:10, and Revelation 5:9 and 14:3). The concept of the new song means there should be something fresh and dynamic about worship and the songs we sing to God. The song of redeeming grace can never grow old, even though the same words recur...Are not His mercies new every morning, and His faithfulness every night?

God's people are invited to sing a new song because the Lord "has done marvellous things." Biblical religion is a historical religion. What this means is that that God has been acting in the lives of His people, like the exodus, the wandering in the wilderness and the conquest of Canaan (cf. Psalms like 136). All the way through God has been bringing salvation. In Psalm 98 we can also note that the word translated "victory" in the NRSV comes up three times in this first section. The Hebrew word is *yeshuah*, which can have the sense as "rescue,

salvation” as well as “victory.” But the word can also be used as the basis for a proper name. The Old Testament name “Joshua” and the New Testament name “Jesus” are both derived from *yeshuah*. The Gospel of Matthew says that the angel said to Mary, “You are to name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). And salvation, *yeshuah*, is what Jesus is all about.

Who is to give praise the Lord? The sinner cleansed by God (Psalm 51:14-15); the upright in heart (Psalm 32:11) and all who fear the Lord (Psalm 22:23). But it is not just people who are to praise God. The angels and all the hosts of heaven (Psalm 103:20-21); all the kingdoms of the earth (Psalm 68:32) and everything that has breath (Psalm 150:6) is also to join in the praise.

Why do we praise the Lord? We praise God for His character and His works. His character includes His Power (Psalm 21:13), holiness (Psalm 30:4), righteousness (Psalm 25:28), greatness (Psalm 48:1) lovingkindness and truth (Psalm 57:10-11) and goodness (Psalm 106:1). His works certainly include His general work as the Creator (Psalm 146) and awesome works within it (Psalm 66:3f), but more specifically, His work saving work toward people in Jesus Christ our Saviour.

But let’s be honest, sometimes it is hard to ‘praise God’ and ‘worship Him’.

Christian songwriter and author, Michael Card, reflecting on the life of the biblical person Job, reminds us of the four ‘successive curve balls’ that Job had thrown his way. There were the three ‘curve balls’ of financial destruction, his health taken away, and a loss of those who called themselves his friends. The final ‘curve ball’ of tremendous pain came through the tragic death of every one of his children. Card notes, “Everything a person could imagine losing, Job lost. He was the target of practically every sort of pain and loss a human being can know. He was like the successful businessman who experienced sudden and total financial ruin. He was like the AIDS patient, hopeless and beyond all cures, full of sores, abandoned by his friends. He was the victim of a senseless terrorist attack. He was the parent who lost not one but all of his children in one unthinkable catastrophe.” But Card goes on to point out that while Job “made the motions of entering into mourning” he did something unexpected, “he fell to the ground in worship.”

Why this ‘worship’?

Praise is the recognition of God's greatness, and God’s power as Creator. Psalms scholar Walter Brueggemann explains praise for us: "All of life is aimed toward God and finally exists for the sake of God. Praise articulates and embodies our capacity to yield, submit, and abandon ourselves in trust and gratitude to the One whose we are."

Praise is our best counter to evil in the world. If we are "lost in wonder, love, and praise," there is less chance to fall into sin, or find ourselves jaded and cynical. Praise is the cure for despair and loneliness.

Praise resets our focus and priorities in life. The reality is that praise doesn't "work." It is not productive, and it isn't even about me. Praise celebrates God's love.

Psalm 98 is opposed to the idea of a fragmented world where the claims of God have no bearing on the rest of our lives. The frame at the heart of our psalm "make a joyful noise to the Lord, **all the earth** . . . make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord" (verses 4a, 6b) declares that God is creator of heaven and earth and thus God of all life and all people. In other words, God is involved in your life, and a life of praise (which does not necessarily mean 'hymn singing' or 'eternally happy faces') refocuses us to what God has done for us in Jesus our Saviour.

We too should be singing new songs for God's salvation in our lives. Jesus Christ has come to bring us salvation. This salvation has completely changed us from sinners to saints. A preacher once told a story of two caterpillars crawling across the grass when a butterfly flew over them. They looked up, and one nudged the other and said, "You couldn't get me up in one of those things for a million dollars." The good news is that this transformation has happened; we are new creatures! The result is that we should be singing a new song of praise to God every day! How can we do this?

How can we praise God continually? Lamentations 3:22-23 says, "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." We have been marvellously changed by God's great work of salvation in us.

As an illustration: Botox injections, instead of face lifts, are becoming quite common. Another preacher has told an account of reading about the number of lawyers, bankers, stockbrokers and salespeople having Botox shots to shape their faces into poses of tranquillity. With a few injections, they are wiping away frowns, scowls and the appearance of weariness, and replacing them with effortless smiles. Those perpetually happy faces beam at arrogant bosses, obstinate clients, resistant customers, sceptical juries and everybody else, even if the person behind the face is feeling something quite different. Apparently it works. After losing his job, a 39-year-old as an investment banker went to interview after interview without getting another position. Finally, a recruiter told him the problem wasn't his résumé; it was his face. The deep lines in his forehead made him look angry, the recruiter said. So the as an investment banker hired off to a plastic surgeon for Botox injections, and, with his new friendly face firmly in place, he landed a new job just two weeks later.

We could say that there are times when Christians have "Botox faces'. Faces that seem to say joy because that is what everyone is supposed to be feeling but it covers the pain, anxiety or depression.

But we have true joy and it is a joy that far exceeds anything that life throws at us. It is a joy that allows us to have a certain and confident hope no matter what

the circumstances are in our lives. It is a joy that comes through even through frustration, tears and pain. That is the real joy we are called to show forth and that in itself is a joyful task! We are to invite the world around us to shout abroad the praises of God. We have experienced God's salvation, our deliverance from sin and guilt! Let's share that joy with others in our lives.

God has worked salvation for us in the miracle of Christ's birth—the miracle of His life, death and resurrection lived for us. Marvellous things that He has spared us from what our sins deserve, and that all creation is promised freedom in Him. He comes to us in Word and sacrament, and fills us with His Spirit.

What a wonderful gift of life we have in Christ Jesus, even in this world of sin, trial, trouble, and death. "Oh sing to the Lord a new song, for He has done marvellous things! His right hand and His holy arm have worked salvation for Him!" In Jesus' name, Amen.