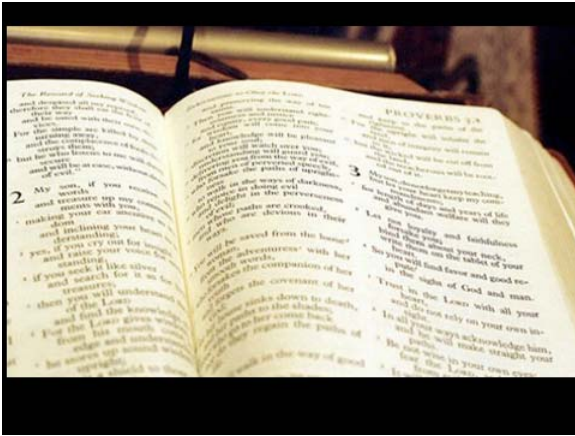

Singing through the Salvation Story



In the Beginning



SONG: Brethren, we have met to worship, Hymnal: A Worship Book, 8, vs. 1,2,3

For all of us as followers of Jesus, the Bible is central. Through it we come to learn about God and God’s mission among us. You can think of the Bible as 66 separate books. But you can also think of the Bible as *one* story:

- with a plot,
- with people,
- with tension,
- and with resolution.

Today we will be singing God’s story of salvation as it’s written through the story of the Bible. Along the way, you will hear narration written mostly by Lois Johns Kauffmann, conference minister for Central District Conference. We’ll have visual images of the salvation story from many artists throughout the years that Loanne Harms has compiled. And we’ll sing songs old and new, fast and slow, accompanied and *a cappella*. But the consistent theme throughout all these senses is that God is, always has been, and always will be a God of salvation.

And so we welcome each of you as together we join in God’s story of salvation:

- We welcome those who love to sing, and those who prefer listening to others sing.
- We welcome those who are gathered here today, and those who are participating electronically.
- We welcome those who came eagerly, and those who are ambivalent about being here.

To each of you, our prayer is that this morning you will experience and worship a God who is “fresh as the morning, sure as the sunrise, always faithful, and who does not change.” Let’s pray:

God of the Bible, God in the Gospel,
hope seen in Jesus, hope yet to come,
you are our center, daylight or darkness,
freedom or prison, you are our home.

Creation



The story begins with God. In the beginning, God created the world and delighted in it. God said it was very good. God made humanity in his own image and was in close communion with those first humans. The King James Version of the Bible says that God walked with them “in the cool of the day.” It is a beautiful image of companionship and closeness. It was very good.

SONG: I sing the mighty power of God, Hymnal 46, vs. 1,2

Exodus

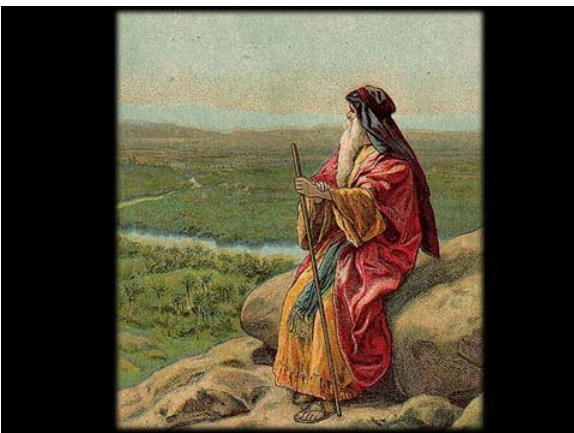
Indeed, it was very good. It was *shalom*, the way things ought to be.



But the closeness between God & humans was broken by sin, sin that continues to this day in the form of needless violence against the earth God created, against the plants and animals that God created, against the humans God created in his own image. And so today, we light the Lamp of Peace to declare how God set about bringing humanity back by making a covenant with Abraham and Sarah, and blessing them so that through their family, all humanity would be blessed. But the way was hard. Eventually the people of God, the people of Israel, found themselves in slavery in Egypt. Yet always God’s desire was to restore the close relationship that had been there at the beginning.

SONG: When Israel was in Egypt’s land, Hymnal 164, vs. 1,4

Wandering



God reached out through Moses and made a covenant with the people. Yahweh would be their God, and they would be God’s people. That is amazing grace! Through the covenant God taught them what it meant to be God’s people...how to love God and love others.

One of the ways God taught them to worship, and to share with others, was in inviting them to give generously. God’s

people gave of what they had: animals large and small, grain of all types. But always of their first and their best.

Our spiritual practice of offering our first and best happens every day of the week. On Sunday, it includes financial offerings, which our ushers will now receive. As they do that, please offer your friendship and hospitality to those around you by signing the clipboards that are in your hymnal racks.

Let's pray:

God, like our spiritual forebears,
take our silver and our gold
not a mite would we withhold.

Take our love; our Lord, we pour
at your feet our treasure store.

Amen

As the people traveled through the wilderness, God's presence always led them. With visible symbols of God's presence—the Ark of the Covenant, the Cloud and Pillar of Fire, God led them.

SONG: Lead on, O cloud of presence, Hymnal 419, vs. 1,2

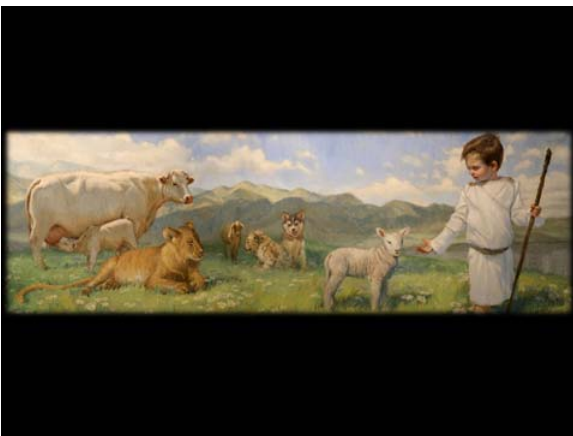
Exile and Return



Eventually the children of Israel made their way to Canaan, the Promised Land. There was the era of judges, then the era of the prophets and kings. The Bible says of the good kings, "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." But the other kings, well..., not so much. So God used Assyria to conquer Israel and Babylon to conquer Judah...taking away God's people into captivity. Just as we have our times of exile, the people of Israel felt far from God, far from the visible reminders of their place in God's love. Hear their longing for a restored relationship with God, for returning to Zion, Jerusalem.

SONG: By the waters, Hymnal 148 (x2)

Waiting for Jesus



The prophets challenged the people to return to God and offered hope for the fulfillment of all their longings for God. God would send the Promised One & again be their God. When? How? Would they recognize the Anointed One?

SONG: Hark! The glad sound!, Hymnal 184, vs. 1,3

The Coming of Jesus



God came and pitched his tent among humans. God humbly took human form, the Incarnation—God with us! That indeed was good news! And with that came surprises. The Promised One was both more and quite different from what God’s people had expected.

SONG: Away in a manger

Jesus’ Ministry



Jesus came announcing the Kingdom of God. He healed. He proclaimed good news for the poor, for the outsiders. Jesus critiqued what would have been the religious leaders of the day. He critiqued what would have been the conference leaders and pastors of that day! His life bore witness to the close relationship God desired with humans. We love these stories. These stories of Jesus’ life and Jesus’ teachings are central to understanding God’s mission in the world and our own mission. If we are to follow Jesus in life, we need to know these stories. We need to sign up to be part of the New Covenant –the covenant of love which Jesus brought.

SONG: Lord, you have come to the lakeshore, Hymnal 229, vs. 1,4

Jesus’ Death



But it all fell apart, seemingly. God-in-the-flesh died a humiliating death—the death of a criminal.

SONG: Were you there, Hymnal 257, vs. 1,4

Resurrection



But the reign of God did not come to an end the day Jesus died! On the third day Jesus rose and is alive today. Hope is re-born!

SONG: Christ the Lord is risen today, Hymnal 280, vs. 1,2

Holy Spirit: The Church and Its Calling



When Jesus left the earth in bodily form, he sent his Spirit to lead us. We continue the work of Jesus, proclaiming and living in God's reign—not primarily as individuals, but as a body, the church, the new creation. The book of Acts tells how the people dedicated themselves to fellowship, the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

SONG: Lord, listen to your children praying.

(Pastoral prayer)



Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to breath the church into life and give us the gifts we need to continue God's work of reconciliation. We will sing the next 3 songs in-a-row, without further comment. Note how each song leads to next and expands the vision of the church.

SONG: God sends us the Spirit, Hymnal 293, vs. 1,3



SONG: *There are many gifts, Hymnal 304, vs. 2,3*

How can we be silent

1 How can we be si-lent when we know our God is near, bring-ing

1 light to those in dark-ness, to the worth-less, end-less worth?

1 How can we be si-lent when we are the voice of Christ, speak-ing

1 jus-tice to the na-tions, breath-ing love to all the earth?

SONG: *How can we be silent, Sing the Journey 61, vs. 1,3,4*

Our Hope



Please stand for our benediction and sending song.

We wait in hope...for the time when all of creation will be reconciled to God.

And God’s kingdom, which is near us and among us and within us, will finally come in all its fullness.

Go, saved by the One who is “fresh as the morning, sure as the sunrise, always faithful, and without change.

SONG: *Soon and very soon, Hymnal 611*