

## Sing!

Sermon for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Easter (Cantata)

Sermon Text: Revelation 15:2-4



*And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire – and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. <sup>3</sup> And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and amazing are Your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the nations! <sup>4</sup> Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. All nations will come and worship You, for Your righteous acts have been revealed.”*

Our voice is manifested through our breath. Sometimes we cheer when something good happens. Sometimes we express our feelings with amazement, screaming, shouting, relief or resignation. Everything we do with our breath reflects what is going on in our emotions. You could say that all of this is singing! In that sense, anyone can sing. Whether it's those who cheer on their heroes in the soccer stadium or those who have just passed their high school exams or have been granted the right to stay. They all know how to sing. Only the dead don't sing. Cantata! Sing! is what the name of this Sunday calls us to do. And by this it means in particular the praise of God. So how can we praise God with our voices? One of my lowest experiences with singing was certainly when we started to hold Persian-language services. The first problem was that we didn't have any Persian songs to sing at that time. So we played songs from the internet and sang along. At that time, I was both the moderator (or DJ) and the pastor. With one hand I kept an eye on the computer screen, while with the other I signaled to the congregation when it was time to start. I would lower my hand to start the congregation singing while simultaneously pressing the start button on the computer. But often the congregation would still miss the cue, moaning and groaning to the electronic music. This sounded somehow inappropriate, especially when we sang about God's great miracles, but the singing sounded more like an overloaded truck groaning and moaning as it climbed a steep mountain, always looking for a lower gear. The aim of such singing was that the pastor would finally find the stop button and bring the whole thing to a merciful end. The experience described here is exaggerated. Thanks to our coworkers from the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, our Persian singing has also improved significantly. But there are still moments when songs are torturous to sing and you wish they would end. And yet songs have an immense power that moves us and can change the whole world.

Our guests from Lithuania, who visited our congregation a few weeks ago, spoke of such world-shaking singing. Once every 4 years, a big singing festival takes place in the Baltic states, as many as 20,000 singers take part in this festival. The significance of this festival is special because such singing festivals were suppressed during the Soviet Union. Perhaps that is why they became even more important. In 1989, the singers formed a human chain stretching from Tallinn to Riga, a distance of 600 km. When Russia wanted to intervene militarily, Gorbachev said: "There's no point. They are already singing!" The meaning was clear: When people sing, there is nothing more you can do. He who sings has strength. I imagine it was similar at the time of the Reformation. People began to study the Biblical texts in their own languages and suddenly they understood the Gospel. This knowledge couldn't just be kept in the quiet study rooms – it had to be proclaimed and sung. When they gathered in groups and sang chorales, there was no stopping them. You could say that the Reformation was also a singing movement. The book of Revelation speaks about a singing church under persecution. The text from Revelation we just read is actually a song that the singing church sang during persecution. Even when they were tortured and executed, they sang this song. We don't know today which melody they used, nevertheless, the song succeeds in opening our eyes to heaven. But it is not only the view of heaven that is opened up by the song, but also the view of the past, and in this way, the church of God is united by this song – from the past, present, and future. And that which determines the past, present, and future is God Himself. As Paul Gerhardt wrote: “That which makes me sing is that which is in heaven!” Those who sing here and now harmonize with the songs of heaven. Those who sing here and now, defy the danger and threat of the present. Whoever sings here and now is aware that life is more than the physical events of my bodily existence. Conversely, we can also say that those who don't sing have hidden within themselves. Those who don't sing can't proclaim suffering, joy, and hope, but instead shut

these things away in their innermost being, looking only at what is their own. And that makes you sick. So how can we join this great congregation that has always sung? And above all, how can we sing songs that are in tune and harmonize with the heavens?

Today I want to compare all this with the organ that accompanies our church singing. In my opinion, the organ plays three important roles in our church singing. First, it intones the song; second, it accompanies the song; and third, it gives us a postlude. **Intonation:** Especially when we sing a new and/or difficult song in church, it is important that the organ first plays and intones the song. After the prelude, we can then follow the organ's notes with our own voices. This is how it is with our singing in church. However, in a figurative sense, for us it is mainly about God intoning. The song that God Himself sings, makes us sing. In this way, God takes us by the hand and shows us that He is the one who made the world. The church of God from Revelation sings of the great deeds of God through Moses and through Christ. So we harmonize with the entire history of God's salvation and say to everything: "Thank you, God!" *Great and marvelous are your works, Lord God Almighty!* Revelation intones our singing with a view of heaven. In God's presence, our hearts open up. Everything that has become cramped within us, all areas that are bitter, unapproachable, or even filled with hatred in our hearts are opened up. My song is therefore completely turned towards God. And just as a difficult song, where the notes at first seem strange and unsingable, is filled with sound when the organ intones, so it can be when God intones the melody into our lives. God gives me the strength to see more than what is immediately before my eyes. God also opens up the mystery of my life so that I see not just the confusion of my own mistakes, but a wonderful plan. God has a purpose for my life, and that gives my life meaning.

Just like singing a new song, where I not only need the intonation of the organ, but also the **accompaniment**, it is the same with our Christian life. God doesn't just work once in our lives. He doesn't just show us the tone and then leaves us to continue singing on our own. No, He accompanies us constantly. We must not forget that the song from Revelation is a real song that was sung in times of oppression by the early Christians. When the number and mark of the beast are mentioned, it is probably a reference to King Nero or Domitian, who persecuted Christians. But we can also say that it refers to the resistance that Christians have always faced. The background was therefore that the church was not yet perfected. It was not yet in heaven but was experiencing just the opposite. If our everyday life is a constant struggle for survival, I can also hear God's voice in my life. When I am uncertain due to my immediate life situation and don't know what to do next, I can hear the soft sounds from heaven that not only show me what the next notes are that I can sing, but also open my eyes to the bigger picture. Just as the organ sometimes plays soft notes and sometimes louder ones, God is sometimes more direct and sometimes quietly in the background at my side. I can know that my life is in God's hands and gives thanks to Him, starting with my birth and the gift of life, but also the gift of new life through baptism. And there is so much more for which we can give thanks. We can look back throughout history. Thank you, Jesus, for not shying away from the cross - for me! Thank you, Jesus, for sending so many people who also did not shy away from persecution and suffering for the sake of Christ! Thank you that this message has also reached me over many generations!

And then there is the **postlude**. When the service is over, the organ sometimes plays a postlude. It gives the congregation the opportunity to reflect on the service, to sing a hymn of praise in silence or to utter a cry of prayer. The postlude dismisses us and shows that our singing is not just a passing phase. It is linked to God's great act of creation and connects us with the Christian community throughout the ages. Our voices do not fade into the void but go out and move the world. The pictures and songs that our Lithuanian guests brought with them showed us the power of singing. And the power of 20,000 singers singing in unison cannot be described. How wonderful it will be when we join in God's song with the heavenly choirs from all generations and times. Amen.