

Singing the Salvation Story – The Heilsgeschichte – La Historia de Salvación

Central District Conference

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(Adapted for Hively Avenue Mennonite Church by Charles Geiser)

For us as followers of Jesus, the Bible is central. Through it we come to learn about God and God's purpose and mission among us. One can think of the Bible as a collection of 66 books. One can also think of the Bible as one story of a plot with many characters, a story with tension and resolution. Today we will sing God's story, Salvation Story, German: Heilsgeschichte. Spanish: La Historia de Salvación.

The story begins with God. In Genesis we read, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." God created the natural world, the plants and animals that inhabit it. God then created human kind, male and female, in God's own image. God delighted in the creation. God said it was *very good*. God shared close communion with those first humans. The KJV states, God walked with them "in the cool of the day." It is a beautiful image of companionship and closeness. It was *very good*.

Creation: HWB 46 *I sing the mighty power of God (vv. 1, 2)*

The closeness between God & humans was broken by sin. God set about bringing humanity back by making a covenant with Abraham and Sarah and blessing them so that through them and their descendants, all the families of the earth would be blessed. But the way was hard. Eventually the people of God, the people of Israel, found themselves in bondage in Egypt. Yet it was always God's desire to restore the close relationship that had been there at the beginning.

Exodus: HWB 164 *When Israel was in Egypt's land (vv. 1, 4)*

God called Moses and used him as his spokesperson to liberate his people from slavery, and having liberated them, God made a covenant with them. 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 care for one another. God's presence led them through the wilderness with visible symbols of God's presence--the Ark of the Covenant, and a Cloud and Pillar of Fire.

Wandering: HWB 419 *Lead on O cloud of presence*

Eventually these people made their way to Canaan, the Promised Land and there was a lot of living and learning to trust God along the way. As they became established they were led by appointed judges who governed their life together. They eventually wanted a king like all the nations around them and God consented to their wishes. The Bible says of the good kings, "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." But for other unfaithful kings, that was not the case. God called prophets to confront the unfaithful kings and challenge their status quo of infidelity. Ultimately, God used Assyria to conquer Israel and Babylon to conquer Judah...taking away God's people into captivity. Just as in our times of exile, the people of Israel felt far from God, far from the visible reminders of their place in God's love.

Exile: HWB 148 *By the waters (sing once in unison, then as a round)*

Return from exile: SS 6 *Save us, O Lord (sing refrain 2 times)*

The prophets challenged their people to return to God and they offered them hope for the fulfillment of all their longings for God. God would send the Promised One, the Messiah. In spite of their failing God, Yahweh would continue to be faithful. But when and how would the Messiah come? Would they

recognize this Anointed One?

Waiting for Jesus: HWB 172 *O Come, O Come, Immanuel* (vv. 1, 5, 6)

God came and pitched his tent among humans, among us. God humbly took human form in the Incarnation, the birth of Jesus ---God with us! That indeed was good news! And with it came surprises. The Promised One was both more and quite different from what God's people had expected.

Coming of Jesus: SS 37 *Firstborn of Mary* (sing twice)

Jesus came announcing the Kingdom of God. He healed. He proclaimed good news for the poor, for the outsiders. Jesus critiqued the religious leaders of his day and he challenged what would have been the conference leaders of his day! His life bore witness to the close relationship God desired with humans. We love these stories. These stories of Jesus' life and teachings are central to our understanding of God's mission in the world which we are called to join. 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 and justice and peace which Jesus brought: in essence, shalom.

Jesus' Ministry: *Tell me the stories of Jesus* (see insert, vv. 1, 4)

But it all fell apart, seemingly. God Incarnate died a humiliating death--the death of a criminal. He was crucified on a cross. As the prophet Isaiah articulated, "He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed."

Jesus' Death: HWB 257 *Were you there* (vv. 1, 4)

But God's overarching purposes for the world did not end on that day.

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! We are offered eternal life through the Risen One.

Because he lives, we too shall live.

Resurrection: HWB 280 *Christ the Lord is risen today* (vv. 1, 3)

After Jesus ascended, he sent his Spirit to lead, inspire and empower us to carry on the work of Jesus. We are called to proclaim and live in God's reign as the new creation of God's people, the church. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to breathe the church into life and to give us the gifts we need to continue God's work of reconciliation in the world.

Holy Spirit: HWB 293 *God's sends us the Spirit* (vv. 1, 3)

Church: HWB 304 *There are many gifts* (vv. 2, 3)

Church's calling: SJ 61 *How can we be silent* (vv. 1-4)

We wait and live 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. We long for that day when it will finally come in all its fullness.

Our hope: HWB 323 *Beyond a dying sun*

Come, Lord Jesus!