

How Can We Keep from Singing?

Isaiah 63:7-9

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Prayer: *May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our rock and our redeemer! Amen.*

For many Christians, the first Sunday after Christmas is a time for unwinding, a time out, a time to relax, a “deep breath” Sunday, if you will. We have spent weeks in Advent, waiting, anticipating, and watching. We’ve navigated the rush of Christmas Eve and the joy of Christmas morning: opening presents, eating the Christmas dinner, or greeting family members who couldn’t come home.

Now, we’re in that quiet space of Christmastide. Outside these walls, the world has already moved on. The calendar page has turned. The clearance sales have started, and the Christmas trees are hitting the curb, ready to be picked up by the garbage trucks. But here, we aren’t ready to let go just yet. We want to sing the carols one more time, especially the ones we couldn’t fit into the Christmas Eve service. We want to hold on to the “magic” for just another moment. So this Sunday is our chance to sing our favorites “one last time,” as it were.

But if we’re honest, there’s often a touch of sadness mixed into our hymns today. We feel the pull of nostalgia. We may even feel a quiet disappointment that the “God with us” we celebrate at the manger can feel far away from the struggles we face on Monday morning.

If you feel that tension today, you’re not alone. In our reading from Isaiah, the prophet is doing exactly what we are doing. He is looking back so he can find the strength to look forward. Isaiah can’t keep from singing. After all the warnings, all the dire predictions of affliction, he breaks into a song of praise that sounds like a Psalm. He says,

I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD,
the praiseworthy acts of the LORD (63:7)

But this isn’t a shallow, happy-go-lucky tune. Scholars call it a “prayer of yearning.”¹ Isaiah is recollecting the past to survive the present. He remembers God’s faithfulness in the old stories because God feels absent in the current ones. He is singing through the lament. He is saying, “I remember when You saved us then, so I can trust You to save us now.”

Isaiah centers his song on one specific attribute of God: **Kindness**. Now, we have to be careful with that word. In English, “kind” often gets watered down to mean “nice.” It suggests being passive, a people pleaser, trying to avoid conflict.

¹ As noted by the *Contemporary English Bible* (CEB).

But the kindness Isaiah sings about is not passive. In Hebrew, the word is *chesed*. It is a thick, sturdy word. It means loving-kindness, mercy, and steadfast, covenant love. It describes God's enduring compassion for humanity and also calls people to live with that same spirit—showing loyalty, generosity, and care that goes beyond mere obligation.

Chesed is active compassion. It is a generous spirit that refuses to give up on people. Isaiah reminds us that at the very center of God's heart isn't just a "niceness," but a fierce, everlasting kindness.

Isaiah sings, "I will tell of the kindnesses of the Lord... according to his compassion and many kindnesses." (Isaiah 63:7)

We need this *chesed* because we live in a world that is often overwhelmingly unkind—where political debates turn into personal attacks on social media, where leaders trade insults instead of working together, where policies can divide families and communities, and where ordinary people often feel worn down by the constant stream of anger, fear, and competition that surrounds us. In such times, the active, compassionate love of *chesed* stands out as a powerful alternative to the harshness we see in headlines and public life.

In the traditional church calendar, this week also marks a dark story in the Gospel of Matthew: the slaughter of the innocents. It's a jarring contrast to the "silent night" of the manger. It reminds us that Jesus was born into a world of violence and power-grabs.

But look at how God's kindness shows up in that dark story. It shows up in the quiet, understated kindness of Joseph.

As we learned last Sunday in the sermon, Joseph is often overshadowed by Mary and the angels. But Joseph was righteous, meaning he was kind, faithful, and compassionate. He chose to protect Mary and the baby in her womb from public shame and ridicule. He chose to obey the law of love against the law of punishment. from a mother and a child. He chose obedience over his own reputation. Without Joseph's active compassion, the story of our salvation would have stopped right there.

Joseph reminds us of Boaz in the Old Testament. Boaz was "kind" to Ruth and Naomi when the world was harsh toward them. Because of Boaz's kindness, a family line continued. That line led to a grandson named Obed, who became the father of King David, who, in turn, led—eventually—to Joseph and Jesus.

Do you see the pattern? The story of God's salvation doesn't just move forward through grand miracles and thunderbolts. It moves forward through the "hard work" of kindness.

It moves forward when people like Joseph and people like you choose to act with *chesed* in a world that has forgotten how.

So, how can we keep from singing? We can't. And we sing Christmas carols even on the first Sunday after Christmas. Even when we are tired. Even when it is hard to keep the Christmas spirit up. When the decorations have come down. Even when few people show up for worship.

We sing because God's kindness is unfailing. We sing because God's steadfast love endures. And we sing to remind ourselves that we are called to carry that same kindness out into a world that desperately needs it.

The calendar has turned, but the song remains. God is with us. God has been kind. And God is not finished yet. In the meantime, we keep on singing. For God is good all the time" And all the time, God is good! Thanks be to God! Amen.