

It maybe that at sometime over the recent holiday period you, or someone you know or love, heard a song on the radio or being played and you or they were able to say, "They're singing or they're playing our song". Songs often hold out memories of past days, memories of happy days, celebrations. Of course songs can also connect us back to painful hurts or losses, a song might bring to mind someone from whom we are separated, someone we have lost.

When a woman in a certain African tribe knows she is pregnant, she goes out into the wilderness with a few friends and together they pray and meditate until they hear in their souls the song of the child to be born. They believe and recognize that every person has their own vibration, expressing their unique flavor and purpose. When the women attune to the song, they sing it out loud. Then they return to the tribe and teach it to everyone else.

When the child is born, the community gathers and sings the child's song to him or her. And at all the other milestones of life, adulthood, marriage, that song is sung. Finally, when the person faces death, the family and friends gather at the person's bed, just as they did at their birth, and they sing the person to the next life. There is one other occasion upon which the villagers sing to the child. If at any time during his or her life the person commits a crime or aberrant social act, the individual is called to the center of the village and the people in the community form a circle around them. Then they sing their song to them to help them remember who they are and just who they are meant to be.

In the passage read in Isaiah today we hear God singing "Our Song!"  
"I am the Lord, I created you, I formed you,  
Do not fear, I redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.  
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;  
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, the flame will not consume you. You are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you,  
Do not fear, for I am with you."

Or if you like put it another way, what God said or sang then, is the same as what God says or sings to Jesus at His baptism: "You are mine, you are my beloved"! And this is exactly what God says and what God sings to you, al all of you even today, "You!" "You are mine!" "You are my beloved!"

The people whose song God sang through the prophet Isaiah were a people who had written themselves off. As far as they were concerned, they were already down and out, dead and gone. All they could see was gloom and doom, defeat and dejection, despair and desolation. Yet to them God sang about belonging, about rescue and redemption, about how they were always God's people, that they were people who mattered to God, who belonged, who were loved.

In the same way for us, God sings our song even though we may be facing hard times, even though death may loom large in our windscreen or our rear view mirror God says and God sings that there is nothing to fear.

Yes, there are things that threaten to consume us, problems that eat away at us, worries that ravage us and reduce us to mere ashes of our former selves – even than God says there is nothing to fear.

This is why God and the love of God's is so amazing. We're made by God. We are loved by God. We're in the presence of God, right here, right now and always. This is the way it is. This is not a mistake. This is no exaggeration. God sings our song, your song and it is a love song!

This was the Promise and the song God offered to Jesus at His Baptism. Jesus had stood in a slow-moving line, a very slow-moving line with a very mixed crowd of people, people very much like you and me. Like the people in the crowd, Jesus was waiting, waiting to be baptized by John. Jesus was right there in the mud, with the people, there were no sky box for Jesus!

These two stories are what we could call vocation stories. Both Israel and Jesus have a vocation, a life's-work – a vocation in God, given them by God. Because we have been baptized, because God has claimed us, and as God sings our song we are sent forth into the world ready to face what might come our way.

Are you faced with a difficult situation at work, where you know what is right to do, but you fear the consequences of doing the right thing because it might affect the company's profits or negatively impact your own opportunity for advancement? God is singing your song – You are Mine! You are baptized! You can face up to what is right and to the consequences of those decisions no matter how they may affect you. You do not face this alone; although we may not stand in that workplace or business office with you. You are part of the community of the baptized! You are the beloved of God – God is singing your song!

Are you struggling with division in your family, seeking to find or aid reconciliation, feeling the tugging of the demons of the desire for revenge or the inability to forgive, the icy touch of hate or mistrust, the fire of arguments or maybe even the threat of physical violence? ? God is singing your song – You are Mine! You are baptized! You are the beloved of God – God is singing your song! In saying this - remember that no one – no one - has the right to hurt another person, their child, their spouse, their parent. You can stand up for your own right to be respected and loved as a child of God, adopted through these waters and therefore worthy of love. You do not stand alone, and you can call on us to be with you in person or spirit as you work toward wholeness. You are part of the community of the baptized! You are the beloved of God – God is singing your song!

Are you weighed down by despair, struggling with illness or hurt, fearing for the future? God is singing your song – You are Mine! You are baptized! Rely on God's strength to call out for healing and wholeness. You are not alone; you have resources to draw on for prayer, support, advice, and care. You are part of the community of the baptized! You are the beloved of God – God is singing your song!

Today God is singing your song, our song! God is asking you and all of us to have a true sense of vocation in our living. The word vocation means a call or summons, having a vocation is about more than having a job. It means answering a specific call; it means doing what one is meant to do. It means participating in the work of God. Set apart for ministry in our baptism, confirmed and strengthened in worship, our vocation is made manifest in service to the world. You, we, all of us are part of the community of the baptized!

The song that God sings for you is uniquely yours – God has a call on your life. God is always faithfully committed to you, and out of that commitment God has things to ask of you that only you can do, attitudes and desires that God needs from you. God has tasks for each of us, God has a calling that is just for you! There are situations that you alone face, into which God needs to enter through your presence and influence. There are insights, perspectives, experiences that are uniquely yours which God needs to help others.

Members and friends of Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church, even today, God is singing your song, reminding you of who you are, that you are baptized, that you are loved, that you are sent forth to make a difference in the world.

God sings to you a song that is uniquely yours, yet this song shares rhythms and harmonies with the songs God sings to others around you.

God's song is a song that calls us together in the church to a shared life and ministry, a corporate devotion and dedication, a communal desire to serve others, especially the weak and the vulnerable.

God has a song for those called from time to time to serve Deacons and Elders and Pastors!  
But God has a song not just for those called from time to time to serve Deacons and Elders and Pastors!

God sings to and for all of us. Yes, we see some ordained and installed as serving Officers but they cannot carry out the ministry that God has for all of us to do on their own, it takes the active commitment, involvement and participation of the entire body of Christ that is the Church of Jesus Christ we know as Oakland Avenue to carry forward, share and express God's love song for the world.

In the same way as our Deacons and Elders are called to ministries of leadership, witness and care so all of us are called to our ministries: of teaching, compassion, prayer, music, hospitality, and faithful service to others.

My friends, God is singing, God is singing your song, you are loved, you belong, you are baptized and live and grow within the community of the baptized. So let us love and serve the God who loves us together. Amen.