

East Hartford
5 ord 2014

Alice L. O'Donovan
Isaiah 58:1-12, Psa 112, Micah 6:1-8

It Seems I've Heard This Song Before

How many remember this song from 1942? {Music by Jule Styne and lyrics by Sammy Cahn}

It seems to me I've heard that song before
It's from an old familiar score I know it well, that melody

It's funny how a theme recalls a favorite dream
Dream that brought you so close to me

I know each word because I've heard that song before
The lyrics said, "Forevermore" Forevermore's a memory

Please have them play it again
And I'll remember just when I heard that lovely song before

It's funny how a theme recalls a favorite dream
Dream that brought you so close to me

Please have them play it again
And I'll remember just when I heard that lovely song before

What other refrains do we carry and what refrains have we put back into the universe? Far less musical but deeply engraved in memory nonetheless? Texts like

"Pick up your room."

"Time for homework."

"No, you can't have your own cell phone."

"Yes, you have to eat some broccoli."

"Yes. You have to earn at least half of the insurance increase

on the car.”

We’ve all heard them - we’ve all said them.

We know both sides of the drill - we’ve been the kids who left the dirty socks on the floor, procrastinated on the homework, and tried to slip the broccoli to the dog. And we are the parents, aunts, uncles, babysitters, teachers with the responsibility of supporting kids on their journeys into adulthood.

Can we agree that it takes endless repetition until we, each in our own generation, “get it.” Life is better when work is done on time, when we enjoy a wide variety of foods, and clean up our messes.

Last week we heard the minor prophet Micah tell the nation Israel, “God has shown you what is good, and told you what is required. Treat people fairly, love others faithfully, live in God’s way. Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God.”

Previously we have heard Amos proclaim God’s accusation against those who “trample on the needy, bring the poor of the land to ruin, and those who wonder when they might sell grain, when the sabbath might be over so they can offer wheat for sale.” (Am 8:5.6)

This week the major prophet Isaiah tells the people, to free the oppressed, liberate the enslaved, uphold the despairing, break every chain. Share your bread with the hungry, take in the homeless, clothe the naked, provide for your own. Work hard to feed the hungry, help those who are crushed.

And while the parallels are not perfect, it seems very much like I have heard that song before.

Again and again speaking through the prophets, God accuses Israel of forgetting what God has done for them, indulging in worship for show, worshipping false gods. God complains, “They worship with their lips but

their hearts are far from me.” (Is 29:13) As one commentator puts it, “Ostentatious efforts at piety, devotion and morality are not congruent with God” (Texts for Preaching; Bruggemann et al, Year A, Pg 128)

Again and again we hear God call people to true worship and insist that genuine worship is not about ritual sacrifice, or just going through the motions. Genuine worship is about ethics and care for the neighbor in tangible, practical ways, providing those necessary things which sustain human life; food, shelter, clothing.

We’ve heard that song before. It *is* indeed, from an old familiar score - it is a love song, like a parent’s love song, old language repeated anew in every generation, until each generation in turn, “gets it.” Exodus, Deuteronomy, the psalms, the prophets. The centuries turn. The time of Jesus comes and the score is the same. “We know each word because we’ve heard the song before.”

Love and worship God. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Isaiah breaks new ground as this passage from goes beyond God’s accusation and commandment, to proclaim a lovely promise: When you do these things, you will become someone new, and earn a new name and reputation.

Work hard to feed hungry people, satisfy the needs of those who are crushed.

Then my blessing will light up your darkness

And the night of your suffering will become as bright as the noonday sun.

God’s promise grows, gets better.

*Your people will rebuild the cities that were destroyed long ago,
And you will build again on the old foundations.*

You will be called, “The One Who Repairs Broken Walls.”

You will be called, “The One Who Makes City Streets Like New Again.”

Of course, hundreds of years later, a man sitting with friends and a great crowd of people on the side of a mountain, said it again, “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, so that it gives light to the whole house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so they may see and give glory to God.

Love and worship God. Love and care for your neighbor as you would want to be cared for.

A love song, an old familiar score. A love song from Creator to creation. A love song as new and fresh as the sunrise on this brilliant winter morning. A love song as ancient as time itself.

