

## Open Your Mouth Wide

Psalm 81:1-10, 2 Corinthians 4:7-14

The First Church of Christ in Hartford, Connecticut

June 3, 2018

The Rev. Dr. Rochelle A. Stackhouse

For thousands and thousands of years, people have sung and spoken this Psalm. People in the Middle East, in Africa, in Asia, in Europe, North America, South America, and even, I bet Antarctica. People who had little or nothing to their name and people who had everything. Our great, great, great grandparents, perhaps, or ancestors in faith whose names we do not know. So many times, these words have come from mouths singing gladly, sadly, loudly, softly, sorrowfully, hopefully.

Do you hear what you are saying? Do you hear the voice unknown, or known perhaps, saying to you: "You are not a slave. I have taken away the tools that enslaved you. I brought you up out of the land of slavery."

For some of our ancestors, who struggled under metal chains, these words gave them strength and hope. They may have been legally enslaved, but songs like this kept their spirits free. "Open your mouth wide," the sacred voice said to them, "and I will fill it with the truth that you are of infinite value and deserve to be free." Feeling that sweet, sweet Spirit, they persevered. Many still do.

There are other kinds of slavery. What "strange gods" do we bow down to, as the Psalm puts it. To what do we choose to enslave ourselves? Lots of people these days bow down to the gods of fear, of money, of needing to, literally, be "liked."

Remember, says to us the voice we don't recognize, perhaps, but has been deep inside us from the time the waters of baptism touched our bodies, actually deep inside of us from the time we took our first breath and breathed in the Spirit of God. Remember, says that voice, I am the God who frees those enslaved. I am the God who does not seek to hurt you. Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it with good things. With the food of love. With a new song, a shout of joy.

Don't live enslaved to anything that draws you away from the moral compass of love. Love for yourself. Love for others. Love for this earth. The voice we do not know because we do not listen for it often enough speaks again in the song that comes from our own lips: "I have taken the burdens from your shoulder and freed your hands from heavy baskets." Sounds a lot like "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

We come here every Sunday to remember again who it is we worship, and to cast away those we need not worship. We come here on Sunday and we sing because the world often tells us to shut up. We come here on Sunday and we eat sacred food because we need Jesus, we need Jesus, who urges us again to get rid of burdens we don't need to be carrying so we have open arms and strong shoulders to reach out to one another.

For the past few weeks, there has been a nest of small sparrows outside the front door of the Church House. One morning I happened to come just as the mother or father bird came to feed them, and I saw their mouths open wide, trusting, needing, hungry for the food that would give them strength to fly.

I don't know about you, but I need strength to fly these days. I know I do not, often enough anyway, open my mouth, my brain, my soul, my heart to listen for the voice unknown that I should know. I don't spend enough time in the Bible, in holy conversation about important things with others, in sharing bread imagining Jesus eating with me, in acts of love and mercy, and especially, in song, in loud, joyous, celebrative song, reminding myself and the world that I am freed from and freed for. Music is the language of heaven, I am convinced. Our ancestors for thousands of years have survived, singing. They have sung, said, and shouted "Sing aloud to God our strength; shout for joy to God. Raise a song, sound the tambourine, the sweet strings with the harp. Blow the trumpet, for God has commanded it! If we open our mouths wide, in hunger, in need, in joyful song, God will fill us!"

"There's a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place, and I know that it's the spirit of our God....Stay right here beside me, filling me with your love." Ask and you will receive; open your mouth wide and God will fill you. Let's sing together.