

Connection *Psalm 149 (Inclusive Bible)*

Connection

We can't be human without connection. As I've shared before, the Chinese character for "person" is a pictograph—it's shaped like two people leaning on each other. That image tells us something powerful: being human means being connected. It's built into our very identity.

Yes—we can't be human without connection. We exist in relationship—with God, with our families and neighbors, with friends and even strangers, with all of creation. Whether we recognize it or not, we live in a complex web of relationships.

But as individualism has grown stronger in our culture, we've started to think of these deep relationships as something extra—as something optional—rather than something essential to who we are. When that happens, we begin to lose interest in the well-being of those who aren't directly connected to us.

History has taught us that when fear, greed, and our drive to protect ourselves take over, people end up building unjust and oppressive systems that sacrifice others for their own peace and comfort. Think about slavery—how Black people were exploited and oppressed for generations. Think about the age of imperialism—how powerful nations used military force to steal land and resources from weaker nations for their own benefit. And even now, we see those in power calling the poor a “parasitic class” or branding immigrants as “dangerous criminals,” all to protect their wealth and privilege.

During this Lenten season, we're called to face this deep-rooted sin—the sin of seeing those who are different from us as threats, the sin of justifying the exploitation of others as if it were prosperity and justice. But at the same time, we must remember this truth: God made us to be together.

God created us in God's own image. In Latin, we call that the *Imago Dei*—the image of God. And I believe those three letters—D, E, I—can guide us in how we relate to one another: D for Diversity. E for Equity. I for Inclusion. I'm not talking about policy—I'm talking about how we, as Christians, relate to others! Let's start with D! Look around. Has there ever been anyone who looks exactly like you? Not one. Diversity is a core principle of God's creation. God created each of us uniquely beautiful and beautifully different. Therefore, diversity is not a problem to solve—it is a gift to be recognized, celebrated, and nurtured.

And we're not meant to live above or below others—we're meant to live with one another, to treat one another with fairness and justice. Equity! In the United Methodist Church, when we are baptized, we're asked this question: “Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?” And we answer, “I do.” When we said “yes,” we said yes to equity.

God's grace isn't limited by race, gender, age, or nationality. Even when someone looks different from us, thinks differently, believes differently—we are called to embrace and welcome one another in God's grace. Inclusion! *Imago Dei*—this is the source of our dignity. And this is the starting point for how we relate to one another.

Singing Together

Unfortunately, we don't always get to experience those beautiful values we talked about—diversity, equity, and inclusion—in real, tangible ways. But there are moments when those values come alive. Moments when the walls that divide us seem to fade, and our connection with one another becomes unmistakably clear. When do those moments happen? When we sing together.

We have veterans in our church. I'm not sure how it is in the U.S. military, but in the Korean military, one of the first things you learn in boot camp—besides marching—is how to sing military songs. As new recruits sing those songs together, something shifts. Strangers begin to feel like comrades. A group of individuals begins to feel like a community. I remember those tough mountain runs during training—hundreds of us running in step, completely exhausted. But when we sang together, it gave us strength. Singing pulled us forward. It reminded us that we weren't alone.

And this isn't just a military experience. Many of you know the song “We Shall Overcome.” That song became the anthem of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 60s. It gave people courage, comfort, and hope as they faced racism, violence, and injustice. And when thousands of people lifted their voices together

while marching for justice, they experienced something powerful—a sense of belonging to something greater than themselves. That shared song gave people the strength to move beyond fear and self-protection. It stirred in them a deeper commitment to the common good.

Dr. Marcia McFee describes it this way: “We need moments of collective effervescence—moments that stir our hope and joy in simply being part of the human family.” And here’s the good news: as people of faith, we are invited into that kind of moment every single week. When does it happen? When we worship. When we sing together. When we “sing to God a new song” and “sing praise in the assembly of the faithful.” The psalm we read today captures that beautifully. The psalmist understood the deep, soul-level power of singing together in worship:

Alleluia! Sing to YHWH a new song! Sing praise in the assembly of the faithful! Let Israel be glad in its Maker; Let the children of Zion rejoice in their God. Let them praise God’s Name with dancing, Let them sing with timbrel and harp! For YHWH delights in the people, And crowns the humble with salvation.

This psalm is one of the “Hallel” psalms—the last five psalms in the book. These are songs of celebration, written to praise the God who brought the people out of exile and back home. Just imagine how singing these songs brought healing to a people who had suffered so much. Imagine the joy, the tears, the release—as they sang together again, on the other side of sorrow.

What Songs Should We Sing Today?

So let me ask: What songs should we be singing together today? We know who God is. God is the One who cares for the vulnerable, lifts up the lowly, and sets the oppressed free. And if that’s who God is—then we are called to sing not just for ourselves, but with those who cannot sing songs of joy right now.

We are called to lift up the voices of those being silenced. We should be the voices of the voiceless. Many of you have seen the headlines—many immigrants—both documented and undocumented—being deported without due process. And what’s even more heartbreaking is this: If they speak out against these injustices, they risk everything. Their legal status could be revoked. They could be detained. They could be separated from their families and sent away.

In that kind of fear, how can they raise their voices? Their grief goes unheard. Their cries are swallowed in silence. They can’t sing songs of joy—they can only whisper laments. So what about us? What song must we sing right now?

We must sing the song of God’s heart— The song of the One who made us in God’s image. The Imago DEI! We must sing the song that Jesus sang— The song that proclaims good news to the poor, freedom to the captives, sight to the blind, release for the oppressed, and the year of God’s favor. A song of jubilee! A song of liberation! A song of justice!

And when we sing it together—something powerful happens. The silence of sorrow begins to shift. The tears of lament begin to move. And slowly, gently, sorrow becomes praise. Lament becomes hope.

And if you’re wondering where to begin—how to make your voice part of the song of justice—there’s one small but meaningful step we can take together this week. As I mentioned in our weekly newsletter, the United Methodist Board of Church and Society is inviting us to support the Sensitive Locations Act, a bill that would protect immigrant families from being detained in places like schools, churches, and hospitals—places that should be safe for all. If you haven’t already, I encourage you to sign the petition. The link is in the newsletter. It only takes a moment, but it’s one way we can raise our voices on behalf of those who cannot. One way we can live the song we sing.

So may we as people of God be a community that sings these songs— not just with our lips, but with our lives. May we stand with the silenced. May we sing with the suffering. May we lift our voices for those who cannot. And may our worship always echo the heart of God: A song of justice, a song of freedom, a song of hope—for all God’s people. Amen.