

'Still singing this damn song'

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By [David Kamphuis](#)

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My area—Youngstown, Ohio—had a vigil against hate yesterday. It was impressive. The local Unitarian Universalist church filled its sanctuary to the point of standing room only. Sermons were heard and letters from officials were read. All these condemned the hate that we saw in Charlottesville, Virginia. The vigil ended with the assembly singing “We shall overcome.”

As I was leaving a woman looked at me and said, “This all very hard for an old woman.” I responded with a phrase that I have perfected through long labor at my pastoral duties: “Oh?”

Not looking at me, she was trembling as she said, “I sang that song 50 years ago and here we all are still singing this damn song.” I’ll admit I had no real response to that. Nothing beyond a weak “I hear you.”

The strength of her statement was profound, but the point behind it was something that I run into often. There is this idea that has infected a lot of the culture: that things are worse than ever. Racism is worse than ever. The economy is worse than ever. Church isn’t growing, but shrinking. Despair is a disease and this disease is airborne.

[And, as I’ve written before](#), if your faith was that things would get progressively better, then perhaps that sentiment is right.

But here is the thing: continual improvement is not a promise that God makes. Believe me, I’ve looked all over and I can’t find a single place that says race relations will continually get better until we solve racism. I can’t find a single place

where God says there will be a gradual improvement in the state of the world until all things are right. Sometimes God says quite the opposite, actually.

Because I can never come up with anything on the spot I said none of this to my companion on the street. As I got home I was still thinking about that line “still singing the same damn song.” I actually started to smile because the people of God have two interwoven destinies.

The first is that the people of God are destined to continually sing the same song. How long has “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” been sung, chanted, and spoken in the church? Close to two thousand years now? The liturgy says that “Holy, Holy, Holy” is the song the hosts of heaven continually sing around the throne of God. It seems that the call of the people of God is to sing the same songs.

The second destiny is that, at least in my own Christian tradition, the true hope of the people of God is in resurrection, not progress. The cross does not look like, nor is it, progress. God’s work is made present in death and resurrection, not a progression toward perfection. In this sense, singing the same damn songs actually helps. The same song through ages past connects us to all the times that God’s work of death and resurrection has happened in our world.

So, to my companion on the street I wish I had the presence of mind to say this to you: Yes, we are probably destined (or fated if you prefer) to be singing the same damn songs. Do not despair, but take courage at this. For while we sing the same damn song, God still works resurrection. I have seen abandoned homes be torn down and turned into orchards and vineyards. It’s not progress, but it is resurrection. I have seen empty lots come into full bloom with the beauty of wildflowers. It’s not progress, but it is resurrection. [There is a petition circling around to turn the former site of the Robert E. Lee statue in Charlottesville into a monument to Heather Heyer.](#) It may not be progress, but sure does sound like God’s work of newness and life to me.

Yes, we are probably destined to be singing the same damn songs. For in singing the same song you are connected to all who have sung the song in ages past. You are connected to those who marched 50 years ago. In singing the same songs you are connected to the people of hope. Hope that slaves had for freedom. Hope that exiles had in returning home. Hope that a rag-tag group of fishermen in Galilee found. It’s the hope that despite all the powers of death God still works life.

It has been the same damn song for a while now.

And may we never stop singing it.

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