

Water Song

reflections on psalm 104

The Story Behind the Song

I created this song for the national *Presbyterians for Earth Care* conference in the Rockies last summer (“Too Big To Fail?”). At the direction of theologian Bill Brown, we were drawing our liturgical life for the week from Psalm 104. Actress-dancer-prophet Tevyn East and I were asked to take the water references in the psalm and create morning worship, which we led one wondrous morning as the turning of the earth made the sun appear from beneath the plains to illumine the watersheds of the majestic Rockies to the rear of our open-sky sanctuary.

In biblical truth and physical reality, we are water, beginning to end to beginning. In one creation story it all begins with Wind-Spirit moving on the waters; in the other, the theologs tell us, the breath that enlivens humanity from our source in humus is a moistened aspiration. Is it any wonder the ancients knew earth was satisfied (vs. 13)?

Songs emerge from mystery and the collaboration of community. As Tevyn and I, strangers at the time, e-talked and planned worship across the miles, she asked me to consider changing my original lyrics. At the time, the final chorus line was “Earth is satisfied, Earth is satisfied.” Given the status of water in our world, she was asking, is that line really true? Witness the Cochabamba campesino, rising in protest at the privatization of their Bolivian waters so that they, living on the margins, would now be forced to pay for what is Earth’s gift. Witness the greed of lawns and golf courses, the weeping of Himalayan glaciers and the thirsting of Bangladeshi masses downstream. Witness the dry bed of the mighty Yangtze and Somali mothers raped and murdered on their way home from the well, carrying a precious few drops for their babies. Witness the lyrical change for yourselves.

This song is for the parched masses: endangered creatures who have no voice and human beings with deserts in their throats. And it is for those who speak for them. Orthodox priests and their Alaska Native congregants carve crosses in the ice of Bristol bay and say mass for the salmon. Google it and learn. Bill McKibben and friends of the 350 movement are arrested in D.C. in protest of tarsand exploits. The U.N. tries to make watercourse treaties with no teeth, bound only by conscience. Gathered with the PEC in Colorado was our friend Carolyn Raffensperger, director of the *Science and Environmental Health Network*, who reminded us it’s not enough to project our caring seven generations to the future. The half-life of the nuclear waste we would hide in the salt mines beneath the desert Southwest would suggest it will take 10,000 generations for us to really care.

Last summer, backlit by the setting sun sinking behind the Pacific, my wife Debbie and I witnessed a humpback whale breaching. As we watched her elegant, gargantuan body flee the deep not once, but again and again, each time body-slamming the watery surface of Earth with seeming delight, I thought, “This is ‘Leviathan at play (vs. 26).’” It will forever remind me that one of the fundamental yearnings of Earth is to rejoice! So what *will* our vocations be? How *will* we live? *Will* earth be satisfied?

My partners in this song are Chelsea Young with her haunting voice parts and Keenan Hansen with his wicked bass! Thanks friends.

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Words & Music by John Pitney

REFRAIN:

Em D Em
Bless the Lord, O my soul! Rainclouds rumble and rivers roll
Em D Em
Springs gush down to the ocean wide, drink for the thirsty land provide
C Em C Em
Earth be satisfied. Oh, will Earth be satisfied?

C G D Em
That's how life began: spirit movin' over the waters!
C G D
Creatures swarmed and swam overflowing the ground,
C Em C Em
Then Creator blew a breath, baptized with the dew:
C G D
Breath of life received and humanity breathed,
C Em
Me and you, born of water.

When we wash our face, irrigate the crops, do laundry,
The quandary of God's grace is how we will share:
Leviathan at play, the skinny-dippers in the lake,
Manufacturing, making power from a stream,
These all have stake in the water.

Yangtze running dry, Himalaya glaciers waning,
Somali women die walking home from the well.
Dam, divert, lay claim, pollute it,
Privatize, pass blame, dispute it,
Frack & hydrolize, San Joaquin to Darfur,
We are at war over water!

Another dewless dawn, peasant mothers go for water.
Salmon great with spawn, awaiting our choice.
Up in Bristol Bay, Orthodox Christians pray,
Speaking for the voiceless lending their voice,
Speaking up for:

The Cochabamba campesino, the Islander who fears El Nino,
Walrus babies treading water, Penguin's unborn sons and daughters,
Will we see the need or will we live from our greed?

Songbirds on the river nesting, Tar Sand protestors protesting,
United Nations best intentions to sign those Watercourse Conventions,
For the next 10,000 generations, will we find some new vocations?
How will we eat? How will we shower? Water our lawns? Generate power?
What are we willing to give? The Planet longs to rejoice!
How will we live?