

## Singing Love Aloud

“I will sing of the Lord’s great love forever; with my mouth I will make Your faithfulness known through all generations,” (Psalm 89:1). Psalm 89 doesn’t begin quietly. It’s loud! The psalmist isn’t sitting quietly in a church or a synagogue privately reflecting on it. He sings it, speaks it, and declares it out loud so that others can hear! Love, in the Scriptures, is never meant to stay silent.

Psalm 89 holds together memory and promise. It looks back to God’s covenant with David and looks forward to a future shaped by that same great love. God’s love crosses the boundaries of time. It refuses to be locked into one generation or confined to one moment in history. The psalmist proclaims that what God has done before is what God will continue to do.

The same merciful, boundary-crossing love is what we encounter in Luke 1:57-80. Here, love crosses time, expectation, silence – and even human failure. This is a story about a man who lost his voice and found it again – and when he did, he used it to praise God, and to bless. This is a story about merciful love. If you have your Bible or Bible app handy, turn there with me. **Read Luke 1:57-80.**

## Expectations and Interruptions

“When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy,” (Luke 1:57-58). Love is already visible here. Love is care in action – not just a feeling. Elizabeth and Zechariah were old people – well past child-bearing age. So they have community – their neighbors and family – show up to help take care of them and their little baby boy.

It looks like shared joy after long disappointment. But joy quickly meets expectation. On the eighth day, everyone assumes – they expect – the child will be named Zechariah, after his father. That was their tradition. That’s what made sense. Expectations often feel reasonable – maybe even faithful. But Elizabeth says something unexpected. “No! He is to be called John,” (verse 60).

Just picture that. The whole family – the neighborhood – everyone there is baffled. What?! “There is no one among your relatives who has that name,” (verse 61). Surely Elizabeth needs to be corrected. So, they turn to Zechariah – still unable to speak – with the assumption that he will restore order. He’ll follow the traditions of the people. I have to chuckle about this – Luke records, “They made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child,” (verse 62). They treat Zechariah like he’s deaf. He hears just fine – his problem is that he can’t talk!

Instead, Zechariah asks for a writing tablet and writes, “His name is John,” (verse 63). In that moment Zechariah chose obedience over custom. He chose faithfulness over assumption. “Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he

began to speak, praising God,” (verse 64). Love helps us speak up and stay connected.

Zechariah’s silence had started months earlier when he doubted God’s promise. But God’s love never gives up – it remembers and restores. God doesn’t discard Zechariah for his doubt. He heals what was broken and invites him back into the story. Back into relationship. Real love fixes what’s broken instead of hiding it. Zechariah’s silence isn’t ignored – it’s healed. His restored voice becomes a witness – and holy awe spreads through the hill country as people begin to ask, “What then is this child going to be?” (verse 66).

### **Explosive Praise – When Love Finds Its Voice**

“His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied,” (verse 67), we read next. His voice doesn’t ease back into use. It explodes from him in praise! His words fly out like the foam on a bottle of Coca-Cola after you’ve given it a good shake!

There’s a powerful image that may help us imagine this moment. You’ve probably seen videos before of the little kids with really bad eyesight getting their first pair of glasses. When they first see clearly – when they finally recognize the face of a parent – the reaction is overwhelming. You see laughter, tears, amazement. Love pours out because now they can see what they couldn’t see before.

Zechariah has waited for months in silence, watching God work. Now he sees clearly – and what he sees is God’s faithfulness. “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because He has come to His people and redeemed them. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David,” (verses 68-69). This language echoes Psalm 89 – covenant, strength, and promise.

God’s love doesn’t give up – it remembers and blesses. Zechariah states that God has remembered “His holy covenant, the oath He swore to Abraham,” (verses 72-73). Love crosses the boundary of time. Promises made hundreds and thousands of years earlier are still alive and coming to pass. For God, past faithfulness really does shape the future!

### **From Power to Tender Mercy**

Then the song shifts. Zechariah turns from the mighty Savior to the tiny child in his arms. “And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for Him,” (verse 76). The tone moves from strength to tenderness. From victory to preparation. Why do the two halves of the prophecy sound so different? Because merciful love is both strong and gentle. It can defeat enemies and guide feet into peace.

Zechariah even describes what John will be called to do. “To give God’s people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins,” (verse 77). And then he reaches the heart of the passage. He says, “Because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace,” (verses 78-79).

This is Love that dawns. Love that breaks through the long night – the long night of human sin and death. Love that doesn't shout people out of darkness, but shines gently on them so that they can find their way. Like Zechariah, the Church today is invited to use our voices to praise and bless. God is doing something new. What we have here in Luke's Gospel is a testimonial that Zechariah is allowed to see it, name it, and proclaim it.

## Speaking Love

Psalm 89 reminds us that faithfulness isn't just something we live. It's something we say. "With my mouth I will make Your faithfulness known," (Ps. 89:1), the psalmist writes, speaking of the Lord. There are moments when silence is task avoidance instead of humility. In the musical *Hamilton*, Aaron Burr famously refuses to take a clear stand: "Don't let them know what you're against or what you're for." Later, Hamilton confronts him: "For once in your life, take a stand with pride. I don't understand how you stand to the side."

Zechariah doesn't stand off to the side. Neither does the psalmist. Love helps them speak up and stay connected. Love helps us speak up and stay connected, too. Declaring God's love for all people is an act of faithfulness. What evidence of God's faithfulness do you have? How will you share it – with your mouth? How do stories of God's mercy survive across generations if no one tells them? If – and when – we do, how can we show them that they can count on the merciful love of God the way we have?

Both Zechariah and the psalmist emphasize that God's mercy endures through the generations. We often worry that God will treat our generation differently – that somehow His patience has run out. Or that His love has limits. Lord, forgive us, when we forget You are faithful, and think You are fickle like us!

The Holy Scriptures teach us God's great love for us is constant and unchanging – even as the world changes all around us. What God was for Abraham, for David, for Zechariah – He remains for us. He is forever faithful! There is a temptation to treat love like the "love locks" once attached to the Pont des Arts bridge in Paris, France. They were padlocks that young lovers would attach to a wire fence, and then throw the key down into the Seine River below. They were supposed to be symbols of unbreakable love.

Eventually they proved too heavy to sustain themselves, and had to be removed because they were damaging the structural integrity of the bridge. Human promises can buckle under their own weight. God's love never has, and never will. God's mercy doesn't depend on our ability to hold onto it. His love and mercy – His grace – holds onto us with strong, nail-pierced hands. What would it take to believe that hope for a new era of God's faithfulness could begin with something as small as a baby? Zechariah believed it – because he learned to trust the God who keeps promises!

## The Way of Peace

Zechariah roots his prophecy in the house of David. David was known for military strength, but the Messiah who comes from David's line will bring peace through mercy. God's love doesn't always look like power as we define it. John, Zechariah's son, won't wield a sword. He will use his voice. He will call people to repentance, reveal God's plan, and point to the One who brings forgiveness and peace.

Real love fixes what's broken instead of hiding it – I've said this twice now, so if there's nothing else you hear today, hear this! The ministry of John the Baptist exposes brokenness – but only so healing can follow. Church, who comes after John the Baptist in the Scriptures? Jesus Christ – to save the world and redeem it in His precious blood!

You know, we didn't talk about how or why Zechariah was mute – that's earlier in Luke 1. Zechariah was a priest, he sees Gabriel at the altar in the Temple, and is told he and Elizabeth are going to have a baby even though they're old – and he doesn't believe the angel. He's muted and unable to speak until the naming of John the Baptist a little over nine months later. Our Gospel lesson today is his verbal – and very vocal – response to God's faithful love!

He sang a new song, which none of his family, friends, or neighbors expected. Howard Thurman once wrote:

The old song of my spirit has wearied itself out. It has long ago been learned by heart; It repeats itself over and over, Bringing no added joy to my days or lift to my spirit. I will sing a new song. I must learn the new song for the new needs, I must fashion new words born of all the new growth of my life – of my mind – of my spirit. I must prepare for new melodies that have never been mine before, That all that is within me may lift my voice unto God. Therefore, I shall rejoice with each new day And delight my spirit in each fresh unfolding. I will sing, this day, a new song unto the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

This is exactly what Zechariah did – he sang a new song. Luke 1 and Psalm 89 together remind us that God has always been at work – raising up people, restoring voices, and crossing boundaries of time and expectation with merciful love. Even if we have doubted. Even if we have been silent. Even if we have struggled to believe. God's love never gives up.

Like Zechariah, we are invited to open our mouths to praise God and bless others. To speak love aloud. To trust that the dawn is breaking. How else could we respond to such merciful love – except with love of our own?

**Prayer:** Merciful God, We thank You for Your great love that never gives up and never runs out. When we have been silent, You restore our voices. When we have lived in darkness, You send Your Light. Open our mouths to speak praises of You and blessings to others, and our lives to show love in action. Help us trust Your faithfulness across generations and walk in the path of peace You have set before us. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, the Rising Sun from heaven. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Howard Thurman, "I Will Sing a New Song," *The Mood of Christmas & Other Celebrations*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, (Friends United Press: Richmond, IN., 2011), page 29.