

WGUMC May 19, 2019 Meditation for Music Sunday
Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

Notice that the author of Colossians didn't say that you have to have musical talent in order to sing psalms, hymns or spiritual songs to God. You don't have to have a gift; you just have to have gratitude. That's good news, for I've given up on the dream of ever singing like Julie Andrews or playing guitar like John McCutcheon. I have more gratitude than gift, so the song I sing today is a song of thanks for the people here who do have the gifts for "singing and making melody to the Lord in [their] hearts." [Ephesians 5:19]

These are the ones who know that if you let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, it can't help but come back out with a melody. In other words, God writes the lyrics. Your soul supplies the music.

Music is such a big part of our worship because it leads us like nothing else can directly to God. For author Kurt Vonnegut, the only proof he has ever needed for the existence of God is music. For

many, it is impossible to worship God without it. Even when I am enjoying God out in the redwoods or in the mountains, I am doing so to the soundtrack of nature: water on rocks, bullfrogs in the pond, the rhythm section; breeze blowing through trees, whistling through the hills, the wind section; bees buzzing and grasshoppers jumping, the string section; tule elk bugling, elephant seals honking, the brass section.

For many people who come to worship God in a church, music is the language of the soul. It helps us express the inexpressible. You don't need any words at all, which is why we have bells. Psalm 150 says, "Praise God with clanging cymbals; praise God with loud clashing cymbals!" And though our bells aren't always clanging and clashing, they are always praising God and helping us to do the same. Bell choir, you ring us into the presence of the Spirit of God, whose sighs are too deep for words. Thank you.

Music doesn't need words, but music does have an amazing ability to give words more power and deeper meaning. The history of

hymns is the history of setting sacred scripture to music because early on we learned that this is a particularly powerful way to teach truth and transform lives. For Paul, hymns were just one of the many tools in his evangelistic toolbag. He asked the Corinthians: “What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.” [I Corinthians 14:26]

Early hymns were a way of teaching gospel truth, so that people who couldn't read it could at least sing it. And if they could sing it, they could live it. By the time Charles Wesley showed up, most of us could read the Bible for ourselves, but he knew that we still needed hymns, because a good hymn or anthem weds the Gospel with a melody so that truth can live in our memory, ready to be pulled out whenever our faith gets a little shaky. Thank you, choir, for so faithfully teaching us about the “love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven to earth come down.”

But music doesn't just preach and teach. When we sing, it helps us feel. It helps us heal. The author of James writes, "Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise." Good advice, but Methodists don't just sing when we're cheerful. We also sing when we are fearful. We even sing when we are tearful. This afternoon, we will sing our way through Peggy's memorial not because we want the music to pretty up our sadness. No, for Methodists, music helps us engage that sadness without getting swallowed up by it. Music makes us brave enough to enter into those dark corners of our lives and it touches us in those tender places. Music assures us that God is there with us. As Psalm 42 says, "By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life." [Psalm 42:8]

So, Praise band, when you sing your prayer songs each week, you remind us of the God who has always been our help. Thank you for showing us that Psalm 63 is right: no matter how screwed up life is,

when we take refuge in the shadow of God's wings, we can sing for joy. [Psalm 63:7]

So this is my song of thanksgiving. Aren't you glad I didn't sing it. But here are some flowers to go with it. [bouquets for Bob, Tom and Michael]