

Ephesians 5:18-20
Music, the Language of Worship
Sunday September 10th, 2017

50 to 75% of Christian worship is music depending on the style of worship! We are either singing, listening to singing or musical instrumentation the majority of time in our worship.

And being from a Methodist background most of what we do is singing. From the beginning of the Methodist movement we have been known as the “singing Methodists”. Charles Wesley, one of the founders of our denomination, wrote over 3000 hymns for the people called Methodists.

We are born to sing. As a paraphrase of Psalm 139 reminds us, **“You, (and I believe your ability) to sing is fearfully and wonderfully made.”** *“Around the 12 week mark, the vocal cords of a baby growing in the womb are in place and have been shown to work long before a baby is born. We may sound different, but each of us has the same vocal apparatus (you, me, Bono, Pavarotti, Sinatra)...”* Psalm 8 reminds us that **‘God has ordained praise out of the mouth of infants and babes.’**

When I was at Christ Church there was a young baby that used to coo and make noises in the rhythm and cadence of my speaking. He was the greatest Amen Choir I ever had.

God built the ability to sing and make music into our very DNA. It is a gift to be enjoyed and used. From the beginning in the Bible musicians have been ordained and noted. In Genesis 4:21 we hear of a man named **Jubal who, “was the father of all who play string instruments and pipes.”**

In 1 Chronicles we read of David appointing 288 musicians to serve before the Lord to lead the people of God in worship.

The Psalms, all 150 of them, are the words of songs stripped of their musical notes and instrumentation. The Psalms are the song book of the Bible without one note of music associated with them in how to

sing them. This allows us and encourages us to do what the Psalms themselves encourage and that is to **“Make a new song for the Lord.”** We can take the words of these ancient songs and hymns and interpret their meaning for new generations and make new songs for God.

Singing and hymns have always been important in the Bible. Parts of hymns and songs are imbedded throughout the Bible. From the Song of Moses and Miriam to the Song of Solomon celebrating physical love in the Old Testament to parts of hymns in the New Testament that lift up some of our most profound theology and belief. The songs and their words are there.

Philippians 2:7-11 is a hymn sung by the first believers in Christ Jesus. Hear these words, **“rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.**

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”



In song and word the Preexistent Christ is Glorified and his humility and sacrifice on our behalf is lifted up as our example to follow. It is profound theology in an ancient hymn.

Well, why worship God in music, hymns and new songs? Well,... music helps us address God in at least 2 and sometimes 3 languages at the same time: the notes, the words and the Spirit.

First, the language of the musical notes themselves, evoke deep powerful emotions and images. Beat, rhythm, volume, bass, major or minor key can inspire, calm (thus music therapy), depress (the old joke is Country Western music can depress you. My friend Michael Brunk whose wife died in Jan, his mother in March, followed by his dog called me up and said he could now write a Country Western song.)

Well, all these things and styles of music can excite, enrage (think Death Metal Music) or bring a reflective mood for prayer and communion in the presence of God. (Thus in our 10am service we have music and songs of preparation for prayer and at our 1pm Contemporary service we have the song “The Heart of Worship”)

Singing, or making music on an instrument, draws our whole being into worship. **It's physical** (breathing, singing, playing an instrument). **It's intellectual**, the words of the hymn or song. **It's emotional** for music draws out our emotions and most of all; **it's deeply spiritual**, drawing us into the presence of God.

All of these things together help us remember the truths of our faith. There is something about singing that enhances our minds ability to memorize. One author I read wrote, *“We are confident that, right now, 99 percent of this book's readers can remember more lyrics set to music than can recite Scripture by rote.”* (Hum “Amazing Grace” and ask what is that song, what are the words?)

Music, singing, unites us into a community! We become one in Christ as we sing. We are filled with the Spirit. Singing together with the angels in the presence of God is a vision of the unity we will share in in heaven.



We become one because first of all we are sharing in a common experience. Together we create a beautiful sound. *“The congregation of the church is the ultimate choir, and it is without audition, everyone can be in it and should be in it.”* As we sing together we share the deep truths of our faith. We focus together on God who is the point of our worship as we engage our minds in the words we are singing.

Now the Ephesian verse says, **“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs of the Spirit.”** As a young man, when I first read this, I thought how odd; when they met each other on the street they were supposed to sing to one another. Glad we don’t have to do that even though in my family we often unconsciously sing our “Hellos.”

What some scholars think they are referring to here is the antiphonal singing where a Cantor sings and the people respond, or like it was in early Methodism, the Pastor would sing a line of a song and the people would sing it back until the congregation learned the song and then they would sing it together.

Early Methodist preachers were required to know how to sing and lead people in the singing of the hymns. The hymns of the Methodist faith contained, and to this day, contain the summation of our teachings. Here is an 1849 Methodist Hymnal.



It was produced in 1849. It has 1148 songs and not a single note or musical score for instructions in how to sing them. It is like the Psalms stripped of all musical notes; so that each generation can add new tunes. Books existed with the musicals scores, but not in pew hymnals like this.

Today many churches, including our own, are going to screens for the singing. No notes are displayed, just words. It is “back to the future”. Marshal our Musical Director pointed out that this has improved the singing and sense of community for our faces are not buried in a

hymn book, but lifted up to God and we can connect better in fellowship as we sing out.

Words stripped of music allow many styles of music to convey the meaning. And ultimately what is important is not the music, but the focus of the music: God!

In my worship experience I have worshipped God with traditional music, hymns, classical music, Jamaican Reggae music, Tazi music, Gospel music, Jazz, Praise and have even experienced some of the most beautiful singing I have heard: people singing in tongues to God. The sound is like angels singing, but for me it did not engage my mind only my emotions, but some need that deeply emotional approach to God and God bless them in that.

The words of the Psalms and other songs are stripped of their music so every age, every culture can write a new song to be sung from their heart to God. Style doesn't matter to God—only to us. It is the heart that matters to God. Where is your heart when you sing? Is it giving to God, in line with God's heart? As our scripture says, **"Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord."**

'The true beauty of a congregation as a choir is that our voices and our hearts are knit together in thanksgiving and praise.' As our scripture said, **"Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."** It's a vision of heaven.

Now unless you are on stage leading the singing, or behind a microphone leading the singing, don't worry how you sound. Honor God with what he's given you and your heart.

Singer song writer Keith Getty wrote about *"one of his band members, Zach White, who recently told him of the inspiration his dad has been to him and his siblings when it comes to singing in the church. Mr. White is always the most passionate singer in the congregation, despite only having three notes he can actually sing, and none of them in tune. But it never holds him back. He has grasped what*

congregational singing is, and is not, about.” And that is the Heart and God.

Finally, *“worship music provides the sound track for our week.”* When we sing the songs on Sunday they can motivate us all week as we sing them again with our voices and in our minds. Christ filled songs can motivate us to greet the day when we just don’t want to get up.

When we feel afraid and powerless we can remember and sing the words of “What a Friend We have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear.”

When we need guidance: “Be Thou My Vision.” When overwhelmed by the presence of God in a sunset: “Majesty, Worship his Majesty”

When overwhelmed by God’s grace and love for you: “Amazing Grace” (My Chains are Broken)

Getting too proud in life and sure you earned your salvation, the words of a Contemporary worship song match: **“I’m forgiven because you were forsaken. I’m accepted, You were condemned.**

I’m alive and well Your Spirit is within me because you died and rose again.”

Finally, what’s the point of it all, music in worship? God!! We can get so caught up in the music we can miss the point. The modern contemporary song “The Heart of Worship” (which you heard or will hear this afternoon) was inspired by a church in England that got so caught up in the power of the music at worship that they cut all musical instruments out of the service for a season.

It was like a rock concert when you worshipped there. They had the absolute best in contemporary Christian music, but they stopped it all for a season to learn once again what the music, any style of music including traditional music is all about.

They simply came on Sunday for months at a time for prayer and preaching. If there was any music at all they sang acapella, without instruments.

The pastor's challenge to the congregation was this, "When you come through the doors on Sunday, what are you bringing as your offering to God?" And he wasn't talking about money.

You see the whole experience became about what people were getting on Sunday (Great music). It had become a consumer experience. And we can develop a consumer mentality be it classic, jazz, Jamaican Reggae, R & B music that leads our worship. (Would you come to a traditional service if there were no prelude, postlude, hymns, and responses?) So the deeper question is what do we bring God? What do we bring God that focuses on God and makes it worship.

Can I suggest you give God your Heart? That is the heart of worship as Matt Redman wrote, "I coming back to heart of worship and it's all about you, it's all about you, Jesus.

I'm sorry for the things I've made it when it's all about you it's all about you, Jesus."

It's how we are filled with the Spirit as we greet one another with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit." We sing and make music from our hearts to God.

In Jesus' Name Amen!