

"Sounding the Notes of Praise." Ex. 15:1-11, 20-21; Ps. 100; Col. 3:12-17  
Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church  
Rev. David E. Young  
Easter 5, Music Sunday, May 10, 2009

Among the many musings about what heaven is like and what everyone does all day long are many jokes about what kind of music God listens to. Of course, each of us insists that our taste in music and God's simply must run along the same lines.

But, while we cannot claim to know with full assurance what God's taste in music is, can we doubt God's love of music? If God were not a lover of music, would God have created the millions of birds who spend their days doing nothing but singing? And the birds are not alone in their tuneful praise. The whole creation cries out hosanna, whether it is in the ceaseless rhythm of the waves washing upon every shore, the deep song of the whale or the way the wind causes the trees to "clap their hands" as the Psalmist imagines. Creation is filled with praise to its creator God.

It is no surprise that music plays a significant role in our lives, and especially in worship. We, the people God were formed to praise him in word and deed and in the music God inspires in our hearts.

Things can go horribly wrong when we fail to give praise and glory to God. The Apostle Paul starts his letter to the Romans with an accounting of all that is wrong in human society. Interestingly, initially at least, Paul doesn't blame our bad behavior on a failure to follow God's law. Nor does he say that if we knew the Bible better we would behave better.

Rather, first and foremost, Paul says, the problem starts when we worship the wrong things. He wrote: "For though they knew God, they

did not honor him as God or give thanks to him ... they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal beings, or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles." (Rom. 1:23).

A Methodist friend of mine, William Willimon, believes that a more accurate translation of Paul's Greek text would be, "They sang doxologies, (that is songs of glory and praise), to creatures rather than to the Creator."

Willimon goes on to say that, in his opinion, bad behavior begins in bad doxology. "It all begins in singing some tacky tune, a doxology to a false God, and the next thing you know we are wallowing in complete moral chaos." (Pulpit Resource, vol.32, no.2, p.18)

There is a vital connection between what we sing and how we live. Christian worship is about focusing on God and aligning ourselves with the strange world of the God who meets us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Worship that is only entertainment is not worthy to be called worship. When we talk about what we "got out of the service" we are guilty of exactly what the Apostle Paul talked about. We've allowed someone other than God to be at the center of our worship and of our world.

Often our self-centered, inward focus becomes so all-consuming that we fail to recognize or remember the gifts God has given us and the beauty that is all around us. Worship becomes a thing we grudgingly attend to as a duty rather than an opportunity to lose ourselves as we delight in the majesty, power, glory and love of our God.

Fortunately, this transition that has to occur in us is often accompanied by music. Music has the power to move us from the small, confining place we think we are in to a place that words alone cannot find. Music captures our longings, heightens our joy and deepens our

trust in the one who has claimed us and from whom we borrow life for as long as God blesses us with it.

To speak the word "Hallelujah!" is one thing. To hear it with chorus and orchestra from Handel's Messiah in the measured rhythm of "HAAAHH, le-LUU-jah" is another. It is enough to make one get up and cheer!

To say, as our Roman Catholic friends do, "Hail Mary, full of grace, blessed art thou among women..." is a very different experience from hearing one of the many settings of the "Ave Maria, gratia plena", which is its Latin equivalent.

To say the Lord's Prayer and to sing those same words are each important, but very different, experiences.

The power of music to draw us upward, to inspire our hearts and lighten our souls, to help our prayers to ascend before the throne of God is something I hope we have all experienced to one degree or another and are experiencing today.

Christian worship, authentic Christian worship has the capacity to cure us of our complaining and negativity. It doesn't do this by issuing rose-colored glasses to each of us as we enter the sanctuary. Rather, it exposes our need for repentance and allows the light of God's love to shine into those dark places in our souls and in our world.

Authentic Christian worship invites us to step out of center stage and put God on the throne of our hearts. Authentic Christian worship is not about us, but about the God who has created us to praise what he has done for us in Christ.

The song we will end with today invites us to remember that in spite of everything, God is still in charge. God's love will reign supreme. As

God's resurrection people we are called to "be thankful, to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly, ... and with gratitude in our hearts to sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God" always giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Christ has risen and is Lord of all! Let us let Christ be Lord of our lives also and let us set aside the cares and the worries that weigh us down so that the song of praise to our awesome God can be heard in our hearts and in our lives!

May it be so for us. Amen.