

## **First Scripture ~ Ephesians 5:18-20**

Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Sermon**

As I think about the past year there are two things that I miss most. One is the ability to sit down with persons and let the conversations take their course. For me zoom calls, while informative, lack intimacy and limit freedom of conversation.

The second thing I miss most during this season of covid, although I would not have predicted it, is our singing together. I am not a great singer and have often joked that if I joined the choir they would politely be trying to figure out how to tell me I could be best use my talents elsewhere.

I remember years ago when I was in my first year as a counselor at church camp I made it though leading a silly song with and 120 4<sup>th</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> graders.. When we got to the 6<sup>th</sup> verse - I missed it so badly that two of the other counselor also most wound up on the floor laughing.

I have appreciated the music Jared has provided during the months of online worship, along with Mallory's contributions. I have listened to others sing during these days, but it is different when we get to use our voices together.

Over the years I have often smiled about Wesley's instructions on singing found in the front of our hymnals. Number four remind us to sing lustily and with good courage. Beware of singing as if you were half dead or half asleep. Number five reminds us to sing modestly and to not bawl. Six reminds to sing in time. And seven tells us to sing spiritually.

Several weeks ago Sandy asked in our study about *Jesus and the Land* what we thought Jesus did as a little boy in Nazareth. My mind wandered to wonder if he every sang like we did in our early years. I decided that he probably went to Synagogue school, but likely did not sing "Jesus loves me this I know."

But the Hebrew tradition is filled with song. When you have wedding feasts that go for days I am sure they would have danced and sung songs. I recall the story of David in 2 Samuel 6:14-16. Here he is recorded as dancing and singing with abandonment before the ark as it returned to Jerusalem. When you read the story carefully his wife was less than approving of his display of joy.

Music, at times, has a way of speaking to us all. It brings memories ~ a song used at a wedding or a funeral ~ a song that saw you through a time of crisis. Songs can touch our heart and reveal our innermost pain as well as our joys.

The Bible is full of music creating moods ~ or response to an event. This is especially true of the psalms ~ which are the songbook of the Hebrew scriptures. The Psalms were Jesus' songbook.

In the Bible we have  
songs of praise to God  
songs of thanksgiving  
love songs ~ especially in Song of Solomon  
songs were sung in prison  
there are songs of sorrow and songs of lament ~  
*how can we sing when God is so far from us*

Probably the greatest musician in the Bible is King David ~ so much so that some of the psalms are attributed to him. He was not only a very talented soldier, but also a talented musician.

Tom Troeger, who was for many years a dean at Iliff Seminary in Denver ~ looks at music through the eyes of David's life in this story "*The Wisdom of an Ancient Musician*" from his book, Ten Strategies.

I share it with you this day. Sit back. Hear David's reflections on his life struggles and see if any of the emotions are ones you have experienced in your life journey.

### **Scripture ~ 2 Samuel 23:1-7**

Now these are the last words of David:

The oracle of David, son of Jesse,  
the oracle of the man whom God exalted,  
the anointed of the God of Jacob,  
the favorite of the Strong One of Israel:

The spirit of the LORD speaks through me,  
his word is upon my tongue.

The God of Israel has spoken,  
the Rock of Israel has said to me:  
One who rules over people justly,  
ruling in the fear of God,  
is like the light of morning,  
like the sun rising on a cloudless morning,  
gleaming from the rain on the grassy land.

Is not my house like this with God?

For he has made with me an everlasting covenant,  
ordered in all things and secure.

Will he not cause to prosper  
all my help and my desire?

But the godless are all like thorns that are thrown away;  
for they cannot be picked up with the hand;  
to touch them one uses an iron bar  
or the shaft of a spear.  
And they are entirely consumed in fire on the spot.

This is the word of life.

**Thanks be to God.**

### *Music*

King David was unable to sleep.  
He slowly got out of bed,  
and walked across the room to the window.  
Stars.

A sliver of a pale moon.  
David did not feel like a king anymore.  
The years had worn him down.  
Nowadays he hardly had energy enough  
to lift his crown  
and sit on his throne  
and hold court.  
David was tired of kingly duties.  
He wanted to be done with them.

His old harp was on the table next to the window.  
David couldn't remember when he last played the thing.  
His hands were too stiff to move from string to string,  
so he had given it up,  
but he did not have the heart to dispose of the old instrument.  
And now on this sleepless night,  
attracted by the starlight  
that glinted off the strings,  
he walked over to the harp and plucked a single note.

### *Pliiing*

The sound faded on the air  
but something stirred in David's heart.

It was the impulse to compose a song,  
to write one last psalm to sing.  
At the very thought of it  
the room seemed brighter,  
his body more awake.  
David wondered;  
what should I write?  
He plucked another string.

### ***Pliiiiing***

And as its sound faded  
his head filled with a melody from his youth.  
He was a shepherd once again.  
Out on the hills alone with the flock.  
His chief entertainment  
besides aiming stones at old clay jars with this sling  
was making up songs,  
picking out the tunes on his harp.  
“The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures.”  
Maybe David’s last song should be like that earlier one:  
music for the lonely to invoke the presence of God.  
That would be a great gift to leave behind.  
Generations hence  
when the community of faith celebrated the ministry of music,  
his song would help them remember  
why music  
is so important to the life of faith:

***Music is prayer.***

***Music is the reach of the soul beyond itself.***

***Music is the assurance of the Spirit’s eternal presence.***

### ***Pliiiiing! Pliiiiing!***

David plucked the harp again,  
and found himself a young man  
standing in the chambers of King Saul.  
At first young David just stood before the great man.  
Silent, awkward, not knowing what to do  
overwhelmed by the sudden change in his stature;  
in a matter of days  
he had moved from shepherd  
to an attendant in the king’s court.

David was just a youth from the back hills.  
He knew nothing about the ways of court and royalty.  
Then he heard King Saul speaking  
It was a troubled voice,  
not the resonance David expected from the leader of the nation.  
but plaintive and brooding:  
“Play me something, Son.  
Sing for me.”

Young David picked up his harp.  
He was nervous,  
him, David a shepherd from the countryside  
playing for the king.  
At first David’s hands did not have their usual agility,  
and his sweet voice was not as focused  
as when he sang to himself and the sheep.  
but the more David sang  
the more King Saul settled back in his throne,  
shutting his eyes,  
the tense muscles in his face relaxing.  
And when David saw this,  
his playing took on its usual assurance,  
and his voice floated sweetly on the air.

Would that be the theme of David’s last song? ~  
the healing power of music.  
That would be a great gift to leave behind.  
Generations hence  
when the community of faith celebrated the ministry of music,  
his song would help them remember  
why music  
is so important to the life of faith:

*Music is a form of pastoral care.*  
*Music is a way of restoring wholeness.*  
*Music offers sanity to a world of mad power.*

***Pliiiiing! Pliinng!***  
The memory of a popular song from the streets  
marched through David’s head:  
“Saul has killed his thousands,  
but David his tens of thousands.”  
It was an exaggeration.

But it was enough to make Saul wild with jealousy.

Saul turned against the young man  
whose music he loved.  
One day he hurled a spear at David  
just missing him.  
David had to flee for his life.  
The terror and the sadness of those distant days  
returned to David on this sleepless night.

As cruel as Saul had been to him  
David had never become bitter about the man.  
Now standing at the window  
and looking up at the stars,  
David sang once again  
the lament  
that he had written  
to commemorate the death of Saul  
and Saul's son, Jonathan,  
the dearest friend of David's life:  
"How the mighty have fallen,  
and the weapons of war perished!"

David found himself crying,  
the tears burning with the memory  
of one grief after another:  
He remembered sending Uriah to his death  
to cover up his adultery with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba.  
Then the child she had born him died,  
and David lamented in a psalm  
"For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me...  
Create in me a clean heart  
and put a new and right spirit within me."

Would this be the theme  
of David's last song before he died? ~  
That would be a great gift to leave behind.  
Generations hence  
when the community of faith celebrated the ministry of music,  
David's song would help them remember  
why music  
is so important to the life of faith:

*Music can be a prayer of confession,  
Music can be a prayer of supplication.  
Music can be the open heart surgery of the Spirit.*

***Pling***

Oh, if only the music of confession  
had sounded in his son Absalom!  
Absalom:  
handsome,  
gifted,  
everyone's favorite.  
But also, arrogant and rebellious.  
When Absalom led the place revolt against his own father,  
David had done everything to save him  
personally instructing his own soldiers  
the young man was not to be killed.  
But Absalom was killed,  
and David's music became the music of weeping,  
the sound of inconsolable sorrow:  
"O my son Absalom  
my son, my son Absalom!  
Would I had died instead of you,  
O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Would that be the theme of David's last song? ~  
music as the bearer of what words cannot bear.  
That would be a great gift to leave behind.  
Generations hence  
when the community of faith celebrated the ministry of music,  
David's song would help them remember  
why music  
is so important to the life of faith:

*Music is the groaning of the Spirit,  
Music is the prayer for which no speech is adequate.  
Music is the aching and the yearning of the human heart.*

The old king wiped the tears from his cheeks,  
while all the melodies mixed together in his head at once:  
the glad songs from his days as a shepherd,  
the sweet lyrics that soothed Saul,  
the laments of confession and grief,  
the psalms of praise.  
Then he reached out and plucked once again a single string:

***Pliiing!***

The solitary tone upon the air  
distilled from all the melodies in his head  
one last song,  
and he clearly saw  
what he had sensed throughout his life:  
The Spirit comes  
through the ministries of music.

***The Spirit comes through song  
through***

***poetry***

***melody,***

***rhythm***

***harmony.***

***The Spirit visits us with vision  
of what is true and right and good.***

The aged king opened his mouth to sing,  
to sing the last song of his life.  
He did not sing as a youth,  
he was too old for that now.  
He did not sing as a hero,  
he was too aware of his own sins for that.  
He did not sing as a warrior,  
he was too frail for that now.  
He did not sing to mourn others,  
for he was about to join them.

He sang as an ancient musician  
whose songs had led him to wisdom.  
He sang as an instrument of the Spirit.  
And this is what he sang:  
“One who rules over people justly  
ruling in the fear of God,  
is like the light of morning,  
like the sun rising on a cloudless morning,  
gleaming from the rain on the grassy land.”

The old king stood at the window  
singing his song,  
its melody flowing out over the land.  
And when he looked up  
every star in heaven  
was singing with him.

## ***Music***

God has indeed gifted each us with the gift of music.

When we lift our voices in song together we reach beyond ourselves ~ it is like a prayer  
~ a way of restoring wholeness.

Not only is music a source of joy which can bring healing and wholeness to each of us -  
- it can be a blessing to bring healing and wholeness to others. May we look forward to  
the day when we can share our voices in song and make a difference in our lives and in  
the lives of others.

May it be so.

## **Song**

***There's a Song*** FWS 2141, *Love, peace, joy*