

November 18, 2018 Reason To Sing Psalm 16

The fact is I am a hummer. As I go about my day's activities, as I do my work, as I shovel snow or walk the dog, I am continually humming a tune. If I do not hum, I whistle. And sometimes, particularly when driving the car... I sing. And as I have aged the music that runs through my every day routines tends to be praise music. The chorus of some old hymn that was in the Presbyterian Book of Praise we used in the '60's. Or it is some very short praise chorus I stumbled across in the '80's. Although, I would never deny there is always the occasional folk song, the occasional country ballad, and a snippet of something from one of those grand musical scores that have become part of any really good movie.

In Lerner and Low's Camelot, which hit Broadway in New York when I was a teenager King Arthur (originally played by Richard Burton) asks the question of Guinevere, "What do the simple folk do, To chase away the clouds when they're blue?" Her first answer is they whistle. Her second is they dance. And they conclude together "they obviously outshine us at turning tears to mirth."

I must have music in my life. And the fact is the faith to which we have been called in the revelation of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit gives us reason to sing. The last three verses of Psalm 16 are particularly meaningful to me. That portion opens with the words, "Therefore my heart is glad, and my tongue rejoices.." I have mentioned on other occasions

that I have battled with depression all of my life. In my teen years I was almost manic. My mood would swing from terrible deep grey to mountain top joy. One of the first really important life lessons I learned was that faith in God revealed in Jesus and present with us in the Holy Spirit was a levelling agent. As I pursued faith, I discovered there was more time that was coloured to some degree by joy, than what one of my favourite fictional characters calls “the blue devils.”

The Psalmist proclaims that when he has set the Lord always before him, in other words having chosen not only to believe but to live as a believer, “because HE is at my right hand I will not be shaken.” I have found this true. “And therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices.” The grey depths grew more shallow and less frequent. And the lifting of my mood required that I sing. Singing praise to God most of all. Music as therapy is a Biblical concept.

So we should not be surprised that it is important to us to sing in the midst of worship. It should never surprise us that we find we have favourite hymns, even as we have favourite Bible verses. Words that we have read and sung to music that moves us, not only toward joy, but sustaining joy, prolonging joy. I also discovered that one of the best things to do when you are down, is to exercise, walk, run, lift, dig....move. And as anyone who sings will tell you it takes effort. You have to breathe consciously as you sing. The diaphragm is almost as important as the vocal cords.

“My heart is glad, and my tongue rejoices.” Singing in general is a physical activity.

Praising God is a physical activity. And sometimes we do it for ourselves. But here is a truth you must never forget and never ignore. Every time the church gathers you can count on this, we will sing together. I sing with you and for you. You sing with me and for me. And together using our tongues to rejoice we praise the God who redeems us. That 9<sup>th</sup> verse of Psalm 16 goes on to say “my body will also rest secure.” It is as though when we sing the praises of our Lord and God our body, our physical being knows, and rests secure, finds a state of well being that we are doing something that is first of all....right to do.

David’s insight is incredible. He was a king of Israel, Some insist that David was the greatest King Israel ever had. We are tempted therefore to relegate him to the category of politician. But he was so much more than that and so much more complex as a man of his time. What he claims here, is that as he picks out the notes on his harp, and sings words of praise directed at the purpose of worshipping God, his body becomes at peace, at rest in the reality that God is not going to abandon him or his body to the grave. In modern parlance, the body knows at the cellular level, that come what may there is the saving grace of God, so that even when we die....it is not over....there is more.

Studies have shown that incredibly ill people supported by a faith community, having faith, surrounded by friends who have faith, are more responsive to the treatment they receive from the medical sciences. And of course in that next phrase David prophecies concerning the resurrection of Jesus. “YOU will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay!” And that affects me. And it affects you. “Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee. How great Thou art. How great thou art.” “My heart is glad, and my tongue rejoices.” No matter what is happening to us or around us, we have, we all have reason to sing.

My late friend, Eugene Burrell would have loved this next thought. “You have made known to me the path of life.” It says three things to each one of us. First of all it says to us that we did not (even though that is the way we tend to see it) we did not simply decide to believe in our Lord. He was extremely active in the arrival of that moment or the emergence of that reality. What we thought we figured out, what we thought we decided, HE gave in grace to us, which is to say we saw what HE wanted us to see, we put the pieces together according to HIS plan for us and so we arrived at a measure of faith.

Secondly it says that our individuality is precious to God. The steps that led me to this place and this corporate experience of the church are not the same as the steps that led you to this sacred space and all we experience in it. It says that we need to understand that the church is not a monolith. We

are not like the paper dolls we cut out as children when we first mastered that scissors skill. We are as marvelously individual as the snow flakes that fell Thursday night. And therefore we must not make too many assumptions about the nature of the flock and flocks of which we have become a part.

And thirdly there is one path of life to which we have been led, which to some degree we have chosen to stick with, to follow the way. We share this commitment to God in Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit. The Bible never portrays a solitary believer, but always a believer who is surrounded by a community of believers. I need you. You need me. And we need them. In many ways my coming to faith was the discovery not only of Jesus, but that I was part of a family that included people of every race, every social class and both genders. And perhaps, even those who are uncomfortable in a clearly defined gender.

I am no more free to cast off the church as something, as a collection of someones I do not need, than I am to deny God's triune nature, or that HIS grace was sufficient to save a wretch...like John Newton, and in fact like me. Wretch sounds a little exaggerated. A wretch after all is "a very miserable person, despicable, without conscience, or shame." And every 16<sup>th</sup> of an inch I am away from that picture today...is God's doing...He made known to me the path of life.

So if you hear me humming a happy tune, or whistling, or singing...yes it will be me! And the truth is I can't stop. We have reason to sing!

Let us pray;

Lord, every moment is not by its nature filled with joy. And yet there are so many moments that are both filled with joy, and the joy of being in your presence. Continually fill our mouths with the taste of your grace and love. And as we taste the joy, make us a blessing to those who are around us, who cross our paths, or even watch us from a distance. Amen