

09.15.24 ~ Pentecost 17

“The Beauty of Music is Unity (*in worship*)”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Psalm 150 ^{NIV}

¹ Praise the Lord.

Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty heavens.

² Praise him for his acts of power;
praise him for his surpassing greatness.

³ Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,
praise him with the harp and lyre,

⁴ praise him with timbrel and dancing,
praise him with the strings and pipe,

⁵ praise him with the clash of cymbals,
praise him with resounding cymbals.

⁶ Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord.

John 17:20-26 ^{NIV}

Jesus Prays for All Believers

²⁰ “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— ²³ I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

²⁴ “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

²⁵ “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

Leader: These are Words of Worship for the People of God.

All: Thanks be to God!

Philippians 2:6-11 ^{NIV}

⁶ Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself

by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

- ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Leader: These are the Exalted Words of God through the Apostle Paul.

All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Dear Lord, our conductor, liturgist, instrumentalist, lyricist, and strength, we thank you for this morning's study and worship together. Help us to remember that it is through you that we find inspiration, comfort, peace, healing, joy, and grace. Through you and your words, we find your truth, spirit, and salvation. Through our worship, we draw closer to you; through our prayer, you hear our needs, and through your music, we praise you collectively, hearing your voice and direction. Please renew us and refuel us for the coming weeks. Instruct us as we study and listen. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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This was supposed to be the last of our short Worship Series of sermons, but the research is so broad on this topic of music and worship that I may continue another week. It is also provoking good discussions for our worship vision team; I hope it has been instructive for you too, while also provoking questions about how our church worships God. Those who attended last night's Ft. Myer Gospel Choir Reunion concert will agree that worship can take many forms, musically. I will share a bit about that experience too.

As you listen to today's message, open your mind to think about instruments, choirs, hymns, styles, sounds, volumes, rhythms, emotions, and the human singing voice. Do we offer these elements of worship only for personal or communal expression, or are they specifically designed to praise and thank God for our many blessings? Or are they tools to produce unity within our congregation? Or all of the above and more? Think also about space, location, history, tradition, rituals, boredom, excitement, fellow congregants, leaders, the written lyrics, electronic screens and technology

versus books in the pews. Think about your physical and emotional reactions to the elements of worship surrounding music. We know our preferences, but is that why we design worship in a certain way? Or do we come to worship to be reminded of our sin, shortcomings, and glorious evangelical and missional potential? Don't we attend worship so that God will **transform** us, by stretching, pushing, and pulling us (like taffy) into a better Christian?

How would your worship experience be different if there **were** no music in the service? In the earliest days of Quakerism (18th Century), music was rejected as a form of worship, yet biblically, music is played to honor God throughout. The collection of Psalms is a rich source of early hymnody. As the church became more developed, Psalms were adopted for formal worship; however, the evidence of musical notation applicable to the Western Church only begins with the 9th century, in the earliest Frankish chant books then on into Medieval Gregorian Chants. For our purposes today, the psalms are poetry put to music and used as worship elements or responses to Scripture, prayer, and in liturgy. "Liturgy" is the term for a system of rituals or elements used in many denominations; we Baptists call it an order of Worship.

Our reading, the popular Psalm 150 is the climax, and one might say grand finale, to the whole collection of Psalms. The writer and we ourselves call upon every instrument to praise God in every place. In addition to reading the psalms as they are, many composers for the Roman Catholic Church used aspects of the psalms as a basis for their works. The Protestant Reformation, which began with Martin Luther's 95 theses attacking the papal church being posted on the door of the All-Saints Church in Wittenberg, Germany in 1517, led to an emphasis on

Psalm singing in the vernacular (German, English, and other languages). It led to congregational or communal singing with metrical versions which loosely approximated the original Hebrew. These used repetitive melodies with simple harmonies. Luther himself wrote many hymns, such as: “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” “How Firm a Foundation,” and “Away in a Manger.” Not all came from the psalms, but his motivation and foundation were Scripture.

Up to then, priests had led any singing (almost in the form of a chant), and it related to Catholic sacraments or a response to reading the Gospel. In the Church of England, for two centuries after the Reformation, there was no hymnbook. Metrical psalms were sung instead, and the Scottish Psalter was created and used. From 1623 and later, hymns and other poems were adapted. By the late 17th Century, hymns were being written by dissenters for congregational singing, and Baptists were the pioneers of this! Isaac Watts, Philip Doddridge, and August Toplady all wrote hymns in the late 1700’s, which are in our 1991 Baptist Hymnal. Other familiar composers’ names are John and Charles Wesley, John Newton, William Couper, and many others: “Rock of Ages,” “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” and “Amazing Grace” are some of the classics. Some of this we’ve learned from our Hymn Sings and David’s extensive research; he’s really the educated expert on this topic. Wherever Luther’s influence was strongest, the organ, choir, and congregations began to flourish.

Johann Sebastian Bach’s cantatas for the Lenten and Advent church seasons were legendary; he was an extraordinary organist and composer during the Baroque Period of history, and although they were popularized

in the German Protestant churches, they are still sung and orchestrated today in translation. The awe and wonder of these compositions were even grander in the worship settings of cathedrals and spaces that had amazing acoustics with reverberation. As more cathedrals and grand churches were built, there was more visual art, sculpture, ironwork, stained glass Bible stories, large choir lofts, and huge pipe organs.

After the Baroque period of excess, the Enlightenment era of intellectual thought closed down many monasteries and churches. This led to itinerant preachers and the Great Awakening; this led to the importance of the sermon, as we discussed last week. Our Minister with Music noted that: “In less "liturgical" churches [where they served], the pulpit is in the center, emphasizing the centrality of proclamation of the Word (and generally speaking, the sermons are longer). So, I would say that preaching is of very primary importance in the Baptist tradition.” That is true! And yet, in contemporary large churches, the next generation’s faith needs are met in longer periods of congregational singing – loud bands playing simple and repetitive lyrics with physical movements encouraged, like clapping, dancing, jumping, cheering, etc.

We participated in some of that last night with the Gospel choir concert and worship. The music, prayers, reflections, and responses were worshipful. Yes, there was a drum set, piano, and organ and 23 choir members celebrating 57 years of legacy, the start of a Gospel Worship Service at the Ft. Myer post in Arlington during a tumultuous time. The historic testimony was amazing, think about the time, Vietnam, race riots, new freedoms for African American troops and women in leadership. Encouragement and support were needed, so faith stepped up through

God's divine intervention and callings of specific individuals, like Donald Wright and many more who were recognized. The music also told the story of unified faith, patriotism, and commitment. The group had never sung together before Friday night, and the rehearsal results were astounding! Their talents formidable, from all corners of the country and even from South America, people came to reunite and reconnect. It was moving to see how the voices united for one goal, one purpose to worship God. Are we doing that on Sundays? We certainly try, but like the apostle Paul told the Philippians as he wrote what is called The Christological Hymn, humility and sacrifice were given for us undeservedly. Our sins were forgiven; we praise, and we love because he first loved us and sent his only son, Jesus. The music we sing brings us together in unity because of Christ, and our mutual belief that he is our savior. More will be shared about music in worship and the Bible in future messages, so for today, let us keep thinking about how music unites us, inspires our Kingdom work, and draws others to us as believers. May we invite others to this amazing concert of faith! Please welcome next Sunday Pastor Francis Phan, also an amazing musician and audio technician. He will share his testimony while I am away. Amen! ||

Let us pray. Dear Lord, we thank you today for these reminders that our comfortable worship could be more transformative to others. Guide our thoughts and creativity to draw others and ourselves closer to you as we meet and sing in community together. Help us find beauty in our worship and music. May your Spirit inspire and empower us to lead others to you. Jesus, it is in your name we pray, **Amen.**