

Our Faith in Music

1 Chronicles 25-28

Colossians 3: 12-17

January 15, 2006

Claremont

Will you join me in a moment of prayer?

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Music is an integral part of worship; in fact, at times I think it is more important than any other aspect of the service.

And because I understand the power that music and hymns have, I spend a great deal of time choosing hymns for each week.

You may not remember what I said, but words set to music can burrow deep inside your psyche and shape and form you in ways that you might not be aware of.

Who among us has not felt the hushed expectation singing Silent Night...

Who has not been moved to tears during the singing of Amazing Grace at a funeral...
Who has not been motivated to offer themselves in some way after singing Here I am, Lord?

Music stirs something deep inside us...

And when a powerful tune is paired with powerful words, the effect is far reaching and all encompassing.

Did you know that in the clearing of the Scottish highlands, the bagpipes were banned because the English knew that they were a powerful symbol and call to action.

In the American south during slavery, the spiritual songs were coded to let people know about the Underground Railroad.

Music can be an act of rebellion, an act of celebration, an act of compassion...

One of my friends comes from a singing family and when her mother lay dying in a hospice centre, she and her sisters gathered in her room and sang to her as she took her last breaths.

Can you imagine that?

What a powerful demonstration of love and caring.

On Monday, I sent out the following questions via email: What place has music had in your life?

Have you grown up singing or playing an instrument?

What kind of music do you think is appropriate in church?

The opinions ranged from appreciating and being open to all types of music... to one person's very definite expression that a drum kit had no place in church!

There was widespread appreciation for music within the church... and also secular music that that has a spiritual message.

Some had grown up singing or playing a musical instrument, some had regrets that they had never learned to play as a child.

A consistent theme from those who responded was that while they appreciated and didn't want to lose the older hymns, they also wanted to sing contemporary ones more often. And along with the contemporary ones, there was an expressed desire to incorporate additional instruments such as flute, drums.

Which ties in with the results of the music survey we did.

So, like many congregations, we are made up of people who reflect diverse styles and preferences.

Our readings this morning reflect some of that diversity...

In our first reading we hear what sounds like a grand religious procession...

David was bringing the Ark of the Covenant, the holder of the stone tablets which Moses had brought down from the mountain... the holiest of holies...

David was bringing it to Jerusalem.

It is written, "So all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the Lord with shouting, to the sound of the horn, trumpets, and cymbals, and made loud music on harps and lyres."

This seems a far cry from our much more reserved way of worshipping, although when I give the children the rattles and shakers...

They make a joyful noise... without regard for restraint... and if you haven't heard me say it before, let me tell you, I would rather have the children here, making some noise, than not have them.

I find their life, energy and enthusiasm a delight... even when it sounds more like noise than music. 😊

This kind of exuberant musical expression is just as much a part of our religious heritage as our choral pieces.

Let's move on to our letter to the Colossians...

This piece of scripture is very different in tone than our first one.

First of all we have to remember that the letters that Paul and others wrote to the various churches were for a very different purpose and in a very different style than other parts of the Bible.

These are not stories like the stories of Creation, or Noah's Ark, or the Exodus are stories. Nor are they parables or stories of Jesus' life.

The letters are usually written to specific communities usually in response to some sort of problem.

The letters address the problem and are written to remind the churches of their common identity and unity in Christ.

In this case, there was dissension in the church about the way to access God.

Whether coming to Jesus was enough or whether there still had to be fasting and worship of celestial powers to gain access.

This particular letter is not thought to be written by Paul, but it does express views and opinions that are consistent with what we know of Paul.

His desire for unity and order in Christ.

Listen to some of those words again: “As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.”

That sounds typical of Paul doesn't it?

And he goes on, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.”

And with those words: sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God, there is the recognition of the power of music and song in worship.

Music is an integral part of the life of our congregation... from the hymns we sing each Sunday morning to special concerts and cantatas to secular music with a spiritual message.

Christine has been an integral part of the ministry of music that takes place here.

She has brought experience and dedication and her influence will live on in all of our lives.

Thanks be to God for those gifts shared, thanks be to God for music.

Amen.