

# **“With a Song In Our Hearts”**

**June 8, 2008**

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## **Psalm 33:1-5**

When we were making plans for this service, the original order of worship included time for what is called a “homily.” A homily can be known as a conversation between two people. More formally, it is known as a lecture or a discourse. For the purpose of worship, a homily is known as a short sermon. Some of you might not think there is anything such as a short sermon. Here’s the difference between a sermon and a homily: a sermon is like “War and Peace,” and you’ve probably sat through some of those sermons. A homily is more like Cliff Notes—just a few condensed remarks.

Today we come to celebrate the gift of God to us, the gift of music. I came across these words about music that I think you might appreciate.

“Whereas painters work with space—the croquet players on the lawn, behind them the dark foliage of the hedge, above them the sky—musicians work with time as one note follows another note the way tock follows tick.

“Music both asks us and also enables us to listen to certain qualities of time—to the grandeur of time, says Bach, to the poignance of time, says Mozart, to the swing and shimmer of time, says Debussy, or however else you choose to put into words the richness and complexity of what each of them is wordlessly ‘saying.’

“We learn from music how to listen to the music of our own time—one moment of our lives following another moment the way the violin passage follows the flute, the way the sound of footsteps on the gravel follows the rustle of leaves in the wind which follows the barking of a dog almost too far away to hear.

“Music helps us to “keep time” in the sense of keeping us in touch with time, not just time as an ever-flowing stream that bears all of us away at last but time also as a stream that every once in a while slows down and becomes transparent enough for us to see down to the stream bed the way at a wedding, say, or watching the sun rise, past, present, future are so caught up in a single moment that we catch a glimpse of the mystery that at its deepest place time is timeless.”

Perhaps it is this aspect of music, the timeless aspect of music that has been so appealing to the church. The composer, Ralph Carmichael, has said, “The church has always sung.” In the high mountain times of victory and celebration or the low valley times of persecution and despair, the church has always sung with great fervor.”

Some of my most pleasant memories in church has to do with music. I have shared with some of you before that I remember as a young boy sitting on my mother’s lap as we sang those old favorite hymns during Sunday night church. It is one way that I learned to read. I was able to follow along and point at the words on the page as we sang them. I can remember sitting

with my brother in church and hearing people who tried to sing solos—people who had one of those voices that was best saved for the shower. There was one man, especially. My brother and I would get tickled when he sang. We would try not to laugh, but ended up laughing harder. I can't remember his name, I'll call him Tony Deaf. You could have stapled Tony's lips together and he still would have sung because he sang straight through his nose. His voice was a combination of a lonely tomcat and the worn-out rear end of a '57 Chevy. But he sang, and he sang with great fervor. If no one else enjoyed it, Tony did.

The church has always sung, and even before the church, music has been part of our faith. If you read the Psalms, one Psalm after another is a song; a song of praise, or a song of lament. A song of doxology, or a song of "nobody knows the trouble I've seen." At one of the most crucial moments in the life of Christ, just after they had celebrated the Passover meal and before they went to the garden, do you remember what Jesus the disciples did? Mark says, "When they had sung a hymn they went to the Mount of Olives." After they had sung a hymn. Most scholars believe the song they sang was known as the Hallel. It is a song that is sung after the Passover meal. "The Lord is with me. I will have no fear. His mercy endureth forever." This is the song Christ sang before he went to the cross.

Now you might be saying to yourself, "This is interesting, but what does it have to do with how we live our lives?" There are these two lessons: (That's another difference between a sermon and a homily. A sermon has three points; a homily just has two.)

The first lesson is this. It is impossible to sing harmony with only one part. Harmony is made for two or three or four parts. We've forgotten that at times in the church. There have been times in the history of THE church, in the history of THIS church, in the history of EVERY church when we have forgotten to live in harmony. We have fought over the silliest things; among them the kind of songs that we sing. In our own lives, in our marriages, in our families, in the workplace, we have often chosen not to live in harmony.

The second lesson from our psalm is this: God has a song for each of us to sing. No one else can sing the song that God has chosen for you to sing. It is a song that only you can sing, and the only way you can sing the song is to listen for the Lord's song.

There's a wonderful story of a woman who was waiting on a bench at a bus stop. While she was waiting she heard a robin singing. She looked around and it seemed that no one else heard the robin's song, which we might say was God's gift of song. As the bus approached, one man dropped a coin out of his pocket. When the coin made a clink on the sidewalk everyone heard the clink of the coin.

What sound are you hearing in your life? Might God give each of us ears of faith to listen for the Lord's song in our own lives, and the courage and love to live the song that God gives to us. Amen.