

August 28, 2016
National Presbyterian Church
Life of King David: “A Song in My Heart”

1 Samuel 16:14-23; 1 Chronicles 15:1, 16-28

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This morning we finish a brief series of sermons looking at the life of Israel’s greatest King -- King David, who lived about 1000 years BC. and whose life was by no means perfect: *he paid the price for his sins and flaws, as we saw last week.*

For all that, David’s rise from obscurity was remarkable, as was his leadership of God’s people: despite huge obstacles and many setbacks, David was the faithful, patient and courageous leader used by God to transform God’s ancient people from a loose confederation of weak tribes, at the mercy of vicious enemies with superior technology, into a powerful and independent nation with a peace and prosperity they’d never known before!

And his achievements were not only political but religious: involving a religious revival that created *hope and faith in God*, in a people who had previously been *dominated by fear*. And this revival was not only personal but corporate; not merely intellectual (stirring the mind), but profoundly emotional (stirring *both* mind and heart) -- and especially doing so through the gift of music and song.

I don’t know if you’ve ever thought about the impact of songs within your life, but for me – and for many, and perhaps for all -- songs have a way of finding a path into our brains, and staying there so that many years later we can remember not only the melody but sometimes the lyrics, *word for word*.

Even when we find it difficult to memorize lines, for many people the simple addition of music can be like finding a key that opens the door to our “little grey cells” so that words, and ideas, and emotions enter in and take over our memories, finding a home, it seems, that pretty much lasts forever.

In one of my former congregations

We had an memory care day care center (providing respite for family care-givers). And when the piano began to play old tunes from 30-40 years before every-one in the room began singing!!

But it’s true for all of us: our minds are filled with words and music covering all kinds of themes.

In popular music, of course, the most popular theme has to do with romantic love.

So in the recesses of my mind, if I go back 50 years, I can hear Sam Cooke singing “*Cupid*” . . . *draw back your bow and let your arrow go, straight to my lover’s heart for me!*

A few years later I can hear The Temptations singing about “My Girl” and Mary Wells – “My Guy”

And then there’s Sonny and Cher singing “*I Got You Babe*” a song about loving someone your parents disapprove of; loving even though you were dirt poor. Which is pretty much the same theme repeated in 2012 (not in my head!) by Justin Bieber and Big Sean when they sang “As Long As You Love Me

*we could be starving, we could be homeless,
we could be broke, as long as you love me” . . .*

And then, just beyond romantic love there are songs about Friendship

So Carole King, and James Taylor are constantly reminding me that it's good to know that "*When you're down and troubled and need a helping hand, and when nothing seems to go your way*" . . . that "*You've Got a Friend*."

And who could forget Mr. Rogers asking us, that since "*It's such a beautiful day in this neighborhood, a beautiful day for a neighbor*,

"*Would you be mine? Could you be mine? Won't you be my neighbor?*"

Of course, with both love and friendship things don't always work out. And above all others, Taylor Swift knows this. Her songs are not in my head, that I know of, but they surely are for millions of others, with Taylor telling them that from her point of view, "*We are Never Getting Back Together*."

Whereas the Bee Gees, who are in my head, are a little more positive, (even if there's not much hope), making me wonder how to fix things: "*How Can You Mend A Broken Heart*."

While Adele hopes that she has the solution and at least takes a step in the right direction: when relationships are broken, what you need to do is to make that phone call, and just say you're "Sorry."

"Hello, from the other side (she's in California, and he's probably in London);

I must have called, a thousand times

to tell you, I'm sorry for everything-that-I've-done.

But when I call - you never seem to be home."

(Who knows -- maybe this is more because of the time change than the sour relationship!)

And there's Elsa in Frozen . . . telling the world just to . . .

Let it go, let it go! I don't care what they're going to say,

Let the storm rage on, the cold never bothered me anyway!

Let it go! Let it go!

The trouble, though, is that it's not so easy, to "let it go"! Once the song is in the mind, the words just keep coming back – which is, of course, my point.

And I've just touched the tip of the iceberg with this download from my memory.

- I haven't even gone to the places in my head where the Beatles live (I'm convinced re 90% of their songs are in there).
- Or to Christmas music (with sleigh bells and jingle bells).
- Or to the classical section where my favorites -- Bach and Handel and Sibelius -- float around.
- Or to the ethnic section where, in my case, Scottish music stirs my soul (think bagpipes and fiddles, and the words of Robert Burns).

And while my list of songs and memories dates me, the fact is that the music and words in each of us date all of us, and have the power to take each of us back in an instant, in a moment, like the flick of a switch, to specific communities and places and times – as if we were there. And it's all in here! within us! Influencing us deeply, whether we are conscious of it or not.

Of course, we're not the first ones to notice this power in music,

Though with the technology we now have to record and listen anywhere, the role of music in all our lives is virtually inescapable and is certainly more obvious than it's ever been.

Even in the earliest periods of history the power of music was profound.

Go back to the Old Testament, to the 4th chapter of Genesis, the 1st book in the Bible, and music enters the picture with a man called Jubal – he's called the *father of those who play the harp and the pipe*.

It's from Jubal's name, which means ram's horn (another instrument) that we get the word "jubilee" -- a celebration. And later in Genesis, in story of Jacob (Genesis, 31) music is seen as an essential part of a family celebration, and moves on *from the family* into the world of religion

So when God's people escape from slavery in Egypt, and their enemies have been defeated, Moses and the people break out into a song of celebration and praise to God with Moses' sister, Miriam, leading the way. In Exodus 15:20-21, we read that

"Miriam took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her - with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam sang,
*Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider God has thrown into the sea.*"

So, in the earliest parts of the Bible, there are these important *but only occasional* references to music and lyrics: music that is both played and sung about God and that finds its way into the hearts and minds and memories and mouths of God's people.

BUT by the time we *get to the life of Jesus and the early church* there's a sea-change. It's no longer just occasional! Songs (along with poetry) are now at the heart of Jewish and Christian worship. Repeatedly so.

In the New Testament, think of Mary, the mother of Jesus in the Christmas story. She's filled with amazement that God should notice her and choose her to be Jesus' mother. And she turns her amazement into praise through a poem that has been sung for generations and that we call the Magnificat:

*My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my savior
For he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant*

And then we have Jesus and his followers eating a meal together and singing just before Jesus is betrayed. They're finishing their Passover meal, his last supper (Mark 14:26). And as they do so they sing a hymn! *Jesus and his friends sang together!*

And this singing-with-Jesus doesn't stop with his death! After his resurrection, it becomes an integral part of worship for all Christians:

"When you come together," writes Paul to the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 14:26) *each one has a hymn.* (they carry their favorite songs of praise in their heads!) This was their practice.

And to the church as a whole, Paul encourages them (Colossians 3:6)

not only to *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly;
teach and admonish one another in all wisdom;
but with gratitude in your hearts
sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.*

While the Book of Revelation reminds us that *heaven itself will be filled with music*. Not just angels with harps, but trumpets and cymbals and pipes -- and voices singing!

In fact, since those early years of Christian faith, music and worship in the Jewish and Christian traditions have become so inescapably inter-twined that in 2010 the *Los Angeles Times* wrote an article pointing out the significant percentage of contestants and finalists on *American Idol* who first learned to sing in church. (An observation, *The Times* said, the producers really weren't too keen to become public knowledge!)

"American Idol's' Christian connection" May 23, 2010|Scott Collins, LA Times.

AND THE QUESTION . . . that arises from all this that I want to ask today, is this: "Where does this emphasis on music and song in the worship of the Christian church come from?" The idea of

using song to share what we believe, to give thanks for what we believe, to help us learn what we believe.

- So we learn not just through rote learning but *through singing songs of praise and thanksgiving* to God
- So our relationship with God enters not just our heads but our hearts?

Where does this bringing together of song and of faith come from? How does this begin? That's the question. To which, in this case, the answer is not hard to find!

- It starts with one person -- Israel's greatest King:
- King David

(1) David – who not only knows the power of music *to stir and comfort the human spirit*, playing his harp for King Saul to soothe his spirit when he was depressed and blue (as we heard in our reading from 1 Samuel 16)

(2) And David – who not only writes the words for hundreds of songs that we call Psalms (a word that means “song of praise”) and *inspires others to write* songs we still sing today.

While the Psalms are called the “Psalms of David,” the Book of Psalms itself tells us that some of the psalms were written by someone other than David, see for example, Psalms 73-83). David was a composer, but maybe his greater gift was to inspire others to compose and write.

(3) But David – who also uses his authority as king to make music and song become a formal and integral part of Israel's worship. *He organizes a whole cadre of musicians* into choirs and ensembles – In 1 Chronicles 15:16, we read that

David also commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their kindred as the singers, to play on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise loud sounds (songs!) of joy.

In 1 Chronicles, the theme is joy (the ark of the covenant is finding a home in Jerusalem!), but elsewhere, and throughout the Book of Psalms, the sounds and songs sing about every human emotion

- From joy, *to* sorrow
- From love *to* hate
- From hope *to* despair
- From self-justification *to* deep cries for mercy

And above all, the psalms lead us TO SING ABOUT GOD!! But not any old God. The God of the Psalms has three over-riding characteristics:

In the music of David, God is celebrated as the CREATOR.

David sings about a God who creates the universe and gives life to all flesh. Psalm 8, for example, reminds us that God is no wimp, but the powerful and infinitely wise creator . . .

*When I think of the work of your hands
The moon and the stars you have created
Who are we that you are mindful of us?
How majestic is your name in all the earth!*

So, the God we sing about and celebrate is God is the Creator

And then in the Psalms, God is celebrated as the REVEALER

David sings about a God who does not hide, but wants to be known and deliberately reveals himself to people, both in creation and in a book. Psalm 19 is especially clear on this!

*The heavens (created by God) declare the glory of God . . .
The (written in a book) law of the Lord is perfect reviving the soul
The (written in a book) decrees of the Lord are sure making wise the simple*

And then in the Psalms David sings about and celebrates the God who is a REDEEMER and SAVIOR

David's God is not the God of Jefferson and the Deists, who makes the world but then stands far off, uninvolved. David's God is a God who enters the world of human beings to care for us when we are too weak to help ourselves. The God of the Psalms is strong enough to break the power of enemies that enslave, and gentle enough to touch our lives with his guidance and love. The Lord is not just my far-off creator, but (as Psalm 23 reminds us) "the Lord is my Shepherd," the one who leads me, and prepares a banquet table for me, even in the presence of enemies; the one who gives me confidence that I shall never want-for what I need.

The Bible calls these Psalms the "songs of Zion" and above all the other songs and themes and voices that fill the airwaves, streaming into our minds and hearts and memories from our iPods and phones, these are the songs and themes and voices that God longs to place within our very souls.

Which is one of the reasons God calls us together— to worship together.

- Of course we can worship at home without going to church.
- Of course we can worship on the hills or by the ocean.

BUT, for all that, what David understood (and seems to have been the first to fully grasp) is that

- it's in the community, it's in the gathering, it's in the service where we not only hear the word of God spoken (and that's my life as a preacher – the spoken word remains critical!)
- BUT where every single one of us has the opportunity to lift up our hearts and voices and SING our faith together
- that the door to God's living presence *not only with us, but within us* is opened wide, and God comes to place HIS song, HIS music, His word, in the deepest places of our soul.

*Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so
Little ones to him belong they are weak but he is strong*

*The Lord's my shepherd I'll not want
He maketh me down to lie
In pastures green he leadeth me the quiet waters by . .*

How do I know that? BECAUSE I SANG IT! . . .

Thanks to David.

Flawed King David: a person noticed by God, and loved and prepared for service by God, and shown abundant mercy, by God.

May we learn and grow in faith from every part of his heritage.

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