

Grounded in Worship: "Melodious Theology"

Colossians 3:12-17

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Rev. Dr. Zachary Hopple
Christ UMC, Lansdale, PA

Worship Question: What is your favorite hymn?

How many of you ever watched a movie? Practically every movie has a musical soundtrack. The music adds feeling and emotion to what's going on. Even if it is just two notes - like...(the song from Jaws). You know what movie that is from right? And you probably don't want to go swimming in the ocean then huh?

But musical soundtracks can create suspense. They can create a sense of awe or peace, or even romance. If you take the music away from a movie, or a TV show, or even a commercial, it changes it completely. Or if you change the style of the music it changes the dynamics of what you are watching or experiencing.

There are some exceptions. I did find that there are some examples where music was purposefully omitted from the movie or the TV show for effect - providing a sense of drama or suspense, or to give emphasis to what was being said. But overall music adds flavor and feeling. And the same goes for our worship.

Can you imagine coming in to worship and not having any music what-so-ever throughout the service? No gathering music. No prelude. No hymns. No anthem. No music for the time of confession. No offertory. No music for communion. No postlude. Music adds a lot to our service and is instrumental in much of our worship.

But music is more than just a pleasing melody or a pleasant sound to add to our worship. It is much deeper than that. The music we use resonates with why we are here. I chose the scripture from Colossians 3 specifically for verse 16 where it tells us, "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."

This was specific instruction from Paul to the church of Colossae that music was to be incorporated into their worship. But I also like that this verse is in the context of working together. "Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone

has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive" (v. 12-13). It continues, "Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (v. 14). Some translations say perfect unity, but I like how the NRSV uses harmony, because harmony has to do with working together.

When two notes sound together that are not in a normal interval, they create a dissonance. These tones can sound harsh to the ears because the frequency of the sound waves they create literally compete against each other. But when two or more sounds play together at a more appropriate interval, they complement each other and they work together to create a pleasing sound. When we work together in unity, we don't always have to do the same thing, but we can harmonize with each other and complement each other to work towards a common goal.

Paul continues, "And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful" (v. 15). We were called to one body and Christ is the head of that body, which Paul describes earlier in Colossians as well as in Ephesians. And as one body we are to work together for the betterment of the body of Christ - for the same goal and purpose. And since Christ is the head he is the one that determines what that purpose is. So as we work together and teach one another and lift each other up, we also share these songs of praise to God together.

And the last verse puts it all into perspective, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (v. 17).

We see music as an integral part of worshiping God throughout scripture. Probably the most prominent musician in the Bible was King David. Originally employed by King Saul to play the harp to soothe him, he is accredited with writing a good portion of the Psalms. The Psalms are actually song lyrics. Not read and recited as we know them today, they would have been sung by the people to the Lord. Can you imagine all of the people coming into the temple singing these beautiful lyrics, harmonizing before the Lord? It gives me goosebumps sometimes to think about one like Psalm 23 being lifted before God.

During the Men's Reading Group last year we read a book that looked at the Psalms of Ascent, which are Psalm 120 -134, that would have been sung as the people made the trek to Jerusalem for the various feast days. It was kind of like the hymns we sing for Advent or for Lent

to prepare for Christmas and Easter to express our faith and lead us in that season of the Christian year.

You see, that is why we use music in worship. It is not just to add something to my boring words from the pulpit. But it is to express various aspects of our faith. When we join together in music - especially when we sing together - it is a communal act of worship where we lift our voices together in praise. Constance Cherry in the book, *Worship Architect*, talks about six reasons why singing in church is important.

1) the Christians church was born in song, emphasizing that it came out of the Jewish tradition where musical worship was incredibly important.

2) We sing because there is a Biblical mandate for corporate singing in worship, which we see in God's directive to include singing and instrumentation in temple worship and liturgy, as well as Paul's instructions for the use of music in our scripture today as well as in 1 Corinthians 14:26 and Ephesians 5:19.

3) It is a communal activity. It breaks down individualism and brings us together in harmonic unity, building a sense of togetherness.

4) It is inclusive. You do not have to be well-trained to be able to join in. Your voice can add to the sounds given to God in worship. I love Psalm 98:4 that says, "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises." It says make a joyful noise, not a pleasant melody.

5) We sing because it is a vehicle for our faith. The lyrics of our songs express our theology. They express our beliefs. They express our faith in God in beautiful ways. When we sing our hymns truly look at the words that are sung. Look at what they convey. Like the hymn for after the message today, "I Know Whom I Have Believed." It speaks of how I may not know why God's grace has been imparted to me, nor why. Christ chose to redeem me, nor how God's Word can bring me indescribable peace, or exactly how the spirit moves, but I do know that I believe in Jesus. I do know where I place my faith. Or our closing hymn, "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee." It is a song that describes the wonderfulness of God, and the beauty of the world God created and the joy that comes in worshiping God.

Which leads us to 6) we sing because it is inspirational. When we join together with these words - they can inspire us. We can get swept up in the sounds of the piano or the organ or the praise band, and raising our voices alongside everyone else's and it can touch our souls in ways

that simple words cannot. It can move us and stir us and connect us to God in different ways.¹

There is a quote attributed to Augustine that says, “the one who sings prays twice.” It gives the idea that singing adds emotion to the words because it involves the heart and the voice. Similar to the quote that I used from Augustine for today’s worship, “Whoever sings a praise, not only praises, but only praises with gladness. He that sings praise, not only sings, but also loves him for whom he sings. In praise, there is the speaking forth of one confessing; in singing, the affection of one loving.”

As a United Methodist Church music is important to us. We often talk about John Wesley as being the founder of Methodism and that is true, but John’s brother Charles was just as influential in the movement. It was both brothers that started the Holiness Clubs in Oxford. Both served as missionaries to the Americas. And it was Charles who first felt his heart strangely warmed and prayed that his brother John would soon experience the same thing, which he did a few days later.

Charles Wesley was a profound hymn writer. It is estimated that he published around 4,500 hymns in his lifetime with more published after his death. The total number of his hymns and poems reached almost 9,000. (I think the number was counted to be 8,989 to be exact.) So while John preached his faith and theology, Charles put it to song for us to sing. And that is what we do. We sing the songs of our faith. We sing our theology.

If you look at the front of our hymnal on page vii it actually gives us John Wesley’s rules for singing. And while some of them sound pretty funny - like IV that tells us “Sing lustily and with good courage,” followed by V that tells us seemingly the opposite, “sing modestly, do not bawl” - III tells us that we should all sing. And most importantly VII reminds us, “Above all sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing him more than yourself, or any other creature. In order to this attend strictly to the sense of what you sing, and see that your Heart is not carried away with the sound, but offered to God continually; so shall your singing be such as the Lord will approve of here, and reward when he cometh in the clouds of heaven.”

However, I do think it is ok for our hearts to get carried away a bit. Because it is one way in which we connect with God and feel the Spirit moving. But even if we are not carried away, we still should sing and

¹ Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academy, 2010) p. 154-156.

make music. We still make music to God because it is right to give our thanks and praise to God.

David Edwards, in the book *Worship 365* says, "Enter through the gates to His presence with thanksgiving and move into the courts of the Lord with a gift of praise. It is inappropriate for us to barge into God's holy presence without praise on our lips and in our hearts. He is the Sovereign of the universe. We should come singing, shouting, dancing, praising, as we are told in His Word. He is willing to meet us anywhere, anytime, anyplace, but we need to come into His presence with the praise and thanksgiving that He deserves and is worthy of."²

Music is a foundational piece of our worship. In case you haven't noticed the altar up front, I added a few things to it a little while back. There are some bricks up there and shovel, as well as some bread and a chalice. Some people have wondered why they are up there. Our sermon series is titled "Grounded in Worship," where we are talking about these foundational pieces of our worship. The bricks give us a visual representation of the theme. They are basic building blocks used to build many things, including this church. The shovel is not just any shovel. It is one of the shovels used at the 1983 ground breaking of the Fellowship Hall. It is a visual connection between this series with our specific church. And the bread and chalice is a representation of our worship. Because while many of these things we talk about are universal across many churches, there are differences.

Some churches do not use organs in worship while others use only the organ. Some use contemporary praise bands while others do not. Ours uses a mixture of everything - from the organ, to the piano, to the praise band, to bells and chimes, to the rainbow bells, to gallon drums and other percussive instruments with the Jesus Jammerz. I had some friends who attended a church that did not use musical instruments of any kind in their church. At one of my churches I served, we did not have any musicians to lead our music at all so we used worship DVDs. The point is, there is no right or wrong way to incorporate music in worship (despite what John Wesley says with our rules for singing) as long as it is focused on praising God.

I had a few people look ahead at the worship question last week, which is "what is your favorite hymn?" And it has a follow up, "feel free to email Pastor Zach to tell him." I had a couple tell me: "Hymn of

² David M. Edwards, *Worship Three Sixty-Five: The Power of a Worshiping Life* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2006) p. 96.

Promise," "The Spirit Song," "Amazing Grace," "Here I Am Lord," "Precious Lord," "Love Lifted Me" were a few specifically told to me. Mine is "It Is Well."

But think about what it is about the song that makes it your favorite. Is it the words? Is it the way it sounds? Is it the way it makes you feel? Is it something that you connect to when you sing it? (Like where you were when you first heard it, or if it was used at a special occasion?)

Think of the words of your favorite hymn. What do they say to you? What do they tell you about God? What do they explain to you about your faith? How do you find peace or comfort in those words?

We have an amazing gift of all of this music in this church. From the musicians that share their talents with us in worship to the hymns given to us over hundreds of years - sharing with us a beautiful way to look at our theology and our faith. All of this is a way that we can express ourselves before our loving Lord and Savior who cares for us and loves us so very much. And while music may not be something all of us may feel particularly gifted at, we need to remember that the music of our worship is not for us but it is for God.

It is another way for us to express ourselves to God. Perfectly pitched or slightly off key, raising our songs of praise to God is pleasing to God. Because we are here, we are present, and we are participating. Even if joining online, I encourage you to sing along or hum along with the songs. Lift your voice to God. Because "whatever [we] do, in word or deed, [we are to] do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (v. 17).

God is worthy to be praised. God is worthy to receive the melodies of our worship as we work together in unity to give thanks for all that God has done. So I invite you to think about that as we worship together. Consider the songs that we use - specifically the words of the hymns - or the meanings behind the melodies. (Sometimes we have footnotes in the bulletin about some of our songs we use.) Consider what they say about God and how they speak to our faith. Take them to heart, share them with God, and let them speak to your soul as we share them together.

References:

Cherry, Constance M. *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academy, 2010.
Edwards, David M. *Worship Three Sixty-Five: The Power of a Worshiping Life*. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2006.