

Luke 2: 41-52

WE HAVE A SINGING RELIGION, A MUSICAL FAITH. DID YOU KNOW THAT? OUR BIBLE IS FULL OF SONGS. CHRISTIAN LITURGY REVOLVES AROUND SONGS. QUAKERS MAY BE THE EXCEPTION. THE BIBLE WITNESS IS THIS: MOSES SANG. DAVID SANG. JESUS SANG. PAUL AND HIS CHURCHES WERE SINGING CHURCHES. THE BIBLE EVEN ASSERTS THAT AT THE CREATION THE MORNING STARS SANG TOGETHER.

BOTH THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE NEW TESTAMENT COMMAND US TO SING AND WHAT A PERFECT SUNDAY TO OBEY THAT COMMAND. I LOVE TO SING.....IN FACT I JOINED THE CHURCH CHOIR IN MY HOME CONGREGATION AFTER BEING CONFIRMED AT THE AGE OF 15. THE CONGREGATION WAS SMALL AND THE CHOIR EVEN SMALLER. I DON'T REMEMBER HOW LONG I WAS ACTIVE BEFORE I WAS ASKED TO LEAVE....THE CHOIR DIRECTOR TELLING ME IT WAS BECAUSE I TALKED TOO MUCH. I THOUGHT IT WAS HER WAY OF SAYING I COULDN'T SING!

SO WHEN I READ PAUL'S WORDS, PAUL'S COMMAND TO SING, I RECEIVE IT GLADLY! PAUL THE APOSTLE WROTE TO THE CHRISTIANS AT COLOSSAE OVER 2000 YEARS AGO, AND HE WRITES TO US TODAY: SING HYMNS, PSALMS, AND SPIRITUAL SONGS TO GOD, ABOUT CHRIST, FOR EACH OTHER. MANY THINGS IN THE BIBLE ARE HARD TO UNDERSTAND, TO OBEY, TO PRACTICE. BUT THIS EXPECTATION, TO SING TO GOD, I EMBRACE WITH ALL THE ENTHUSIASM I CAN MUSTER.

WHEN WE SING, WE SING TO GOD. GOD IS THE AUDIENCE: NOT THE CONGREGATION BUT GOD. NOT THE PERSON SITTING NEXT TO YOU OR AROUND YOU BUT GOD. WHEN WE SING, WE PRAISE GOD. WHEN WE SING, WE PRAY TO GOD. WHEN WE SING, WE CONSECRATE OURSELVES TO GOD.

MUSIC IS AN OFFERING WE BRING TO GOD. EVERYTHING IN WORSHIP IS AN OFFERING. WE OFTEN ONLY THINK OF THE OFFERING PLATE AS THE ONLY OFFERING IN WORSHIP, BUT THE SAME IS TRUE OF OUR PRAYERS, AS THEY ARE OFFERINGS TO GOD, OUR OFFERING OF PRAISE, PETITION, AND INTERCESSION. MY SERMONS ARE OFFERINGS TO GOD. IN THE SAME WAY, ALL OF OUR MUSIC IS AN OFFERING TO GOD. THERE IS A SAYING..WHEN YOU SING, YOU PRAY TWICE.

C.S. LEWIS HAD A WONDERFUL ESSAY ON CHURCH MUSIC. HE WAS DEALING WITH WHAT MANY CHURCHES CONTINUE TO DEAL WITH: HIGH CHURCH MUSIC OR LOW CHURCH MUSIC. AND HE SAID, AMONG OTHER THINGS, WE ALL SHOULD DEFER TO OUR NEIGHBOR. WE SHOULD SAY TO ONE ANOTHER, "I WANT TO SING WHAT YOU WANT TO SING." BUT THEN HE WRITES, "FOR ALL OF OUR OFFERINGS, LIKE MUSIC, ARE LIKE THE INSTRINSICALLY WORTHLESS GIFT OF A CHILD, WHICH THE FATHER VALUES FOR THEIR INTENT."

IS OUR INTENT TO PRAISE GOD WHEN WE SING? AND WHEN IT'S FROM THE HEART, FROM THE SOUL, FROM THE DEEPEST PLACES IN OUR BEING, GOD RECEIVES IT AS IF IT WERE WRITTEN BY MOZART AND SUNG BY ANGELS.

THE FIRST MUSIC WE TEACH CHILDREN IS "JESUS LOVES ME, THIS I KNOW FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO. LITTLE ONES TO HIM BELONG, THEY ARE WEAK BUT HE IS STRONG."

DID YOU KNOW THAT WHEN IT COMES TO MUSIC AND THE BRAIN, THERE IS A VERY SPECIAL LINK? MUSIC IS A POWERFUL MEMORY CUE. HEARING A SONG THAT CARRIES IMPORTANCE IN YOUR LIFE, ELICITS THE ENTIRE MEMORY. THIS REMAINS TRUE EVEN WHEN A NEURODEGENERATIVE DISEASE LIKE ALZHEIMERS TAKES HOLD. MANY PEOPLE WITH ALZHEIMERS MAY STRUGGLE TO REMEMBER RECENT EVENTS, CONVERSATIONS OR EVEN THE NAMES OF LOVED ONES. BUT DESPITE THESE IMPAIRMENTS, REMARKABLY, THEY ARE STILL ABLE TO TAP INTO MUSICAL MEMORIES/SONGS LONG AFTER OTHER MEMORIES FADE.

I REMEMBER LEADING WORSHIP AT A NURSING HOME ONE AFTERNOON AND ALWAYS LOOKED FORWARD TO SEEING AND VISITING WITH THE RESIDENTS. I WAS HAPPY THAT DAY TO SEE A NURSE WHEEL RUBY IN FOR WORSHIP. I HAD KNOWN RUBY FOR YEARS YET ALZHEIMERS HAD LEFT HER MOSTLY SILENT WITHOUT EVEN KNOWING HER FAMILY. TOWARD THE END OF THE WORSHIP SERVICE I SHARED THE COMMUNION LITURGY AND THEN DISTRIBUTED THE BREAD. RUBY MISTAKINGLY THOUGHT THE BREAD WAS A COTTON BALL AND ATTEMPTED TO PLACE IT IN HER EAR; THANKFULLY A NURSE WAS CLOSE BY. AFTER COMMUNION WE HAD TIME FOR ONE LAST HYMN AND I ASKED FOR A FAVORITE. SOMEONE SHOUTED OUT, 'COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS.' A HYMN I DIDN'T KNOW BUT THANKFULLY THE ACCOMPANIST DID! AND AS SOON AS THE FIRST NOTE WAS STRUCK ON THE PIANO A VOICE BEGAN SINGING....IT WAS RUBY. RUBY LEADING THE SINGING..COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS, NAME THEM ONE BY ONE; COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS, SEE WHAT GOD HAS DONE. COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS, NAME THEM ONE BY ONE, AND IT WILL SURPRISE YOU WHAT THE LORD HAS DONE. RUBY, WHO COULDN'T REMEMBER WHAT COMMUNION BREAD WAS, WHO DIDN'T RECOGNIZE HER OWN FAMILY, WAS SINGING ABOUT THE BLESSINGS OF GOD. AND JUST AS SHE HAD REMEMBERED EACH WORD TO THE HYMN, THE SAME WAS TRUE WHEN WE PRAYED THE LORD'S PRAYER.

WE ARE IN THE MIDST OF THE GREATEST SINGING SEASONS OF THE YEAR..CHRISTMAS. WE ENJOY THE ADVENT CANDLES, THE NATIVITY SCENES, AND THE GIVING AND RECEIVING OF GIFTS. BUT THE MUSIC IS PERHAPS THE BEST OF ALL. WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE SONG THIS CHRISTMAS SEASON?

ALONG WITH GOD, WE SING FOR EACH OTHER. YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT SPIRITUAL SADNESS SITS NEXT TO YOU IN THE PEW. WHAT DESPERATE PRAYERS ARE BEING LIFTED UP, WHAT DEFEATS ARE BEING REMEMBERED, WHAT SADNESS HAS SETTLED IN SOMEONE'S

SOUL. YOU ARE SINGING FOR THEM. YOUR WORDS OF HOPE, OF LOVE, OF ASSURANCE, OF TRUST IN CHRIST, MAY JUST BE THE WORDS THEY NEED TO HEAR.

MANY TIMES I HAVE BEEN TOO OVERWHELMED TO SING: OVERWHELMED BY JOY OR GRIEF. IN THOSE TIMES I SIMPLY CLOSE MY MOUTH AND LISTEN. MORE TIMES THAN I CAN COUNT, IT HAS BEEN IN THE HEARTFELT WAYS THE CONGREGATION'S TESTIMONY SUNG IN THE WORDS OF A FAMILIAR HYMN SPOKE TO ME, MINISTERED TO ME, LIFTED ME.

IN FRANKFORT KENTUCKY, THERE IS A CHURCH WHICH SITS ALMOST ADJACENT TO A BRIDGE OVER THE KENTUCKY RIVER. IT IS KNOWN AS THE SINGING BRIDGE, SO NAMED BECAUSE OF THE HUMMING SOUND IT MAKES WHEN DRIVEN OVER. AFTER WORSHIPPING AT THE CHURCH ONE SUNDAY A VISITOR COMMENTED TO THE PASTOR THAT THE BRIDGE SANG LOUDER THAN THE CONGREGATION. PEOPLE MAY LOVE GRAND AND SOARING SANCTUARIES, BUT THEY LOVE SINGING CHURCHES MORE. THEY MAY TREASURE INSPIRING PREACHING, BUT THEY LOVE AND TREASURE SINGING MORE. PEOPLE VALUE MISSIONAL CHURCHES BUT OFTEN ASK ABOUT THE MUSIC. IS THIS A SINGING CHURCH?

IS THIS A SINGING CHURCH? WITH GRATITUDE IN OUR HEARTS MAY WE SING PSALMS, HYMNS AND SPIRITUAL SONGS TO GOD..GIVING THANKS TO THE LORD JESUS. AMEN.

