

THE SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS OF SINGING

Ephesians 5: 15-21

The Ayatollah Khomeini declared, “Music is no different than opium,” and he banned it from Iranian airways. He said, “If you want your country to be independent, you must turn radio and television into educational institutions and eliminate music. Music makes the brain inactive.”

- Classical music for infants in the womb.

What a contrast Ephesians presents when it urges us to “... *sing hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts.*”

- Contemporary theologian: “Music moves us as it teaches us... Christian music both draws expressive responses from congregations (it moves us) and at the same time it proclaims a holy message to us (it teaches us)... Music is a stimulant to devotion, a lubricant to piety, and a powerful stimulator of an appropriate mood.” (1)
- Hans Christian Anderson in his *The Nightingale*: “I will sing to you and make you thoughtful. I will sing to you of the happy ones and of those who suffer. I will sing about the good and the evil.”
- Martin Luther: “I truly desire that all Christians would love and regard the gift of music...for next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure of this world.”

Music engages our emotions and enriches our worship.

- Ignatius of Antioch: “In your concord and harmonious love Jesus Christ is sung... So become a choir, that being in love, and taking up the song of God in unison, you may with one voice sing to the Father through the Son.”
- Luther saw music as a way to teach the gospel: “God has his gospel preached through the medium of music...You may have the pulpit...”

All of this is true in Christian community, but there is more to our singing.

- Ephesians commends singing for its power and for harmony – musically and communally: “*Be filled with the Holy Spirit, as*

you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father as all times and for everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Be subject to one another of reverence for Christ.”

- The command to “*be filled with the Spirit*” is one of Ephesians’ themes.
 1. Speak to one another in song.
 2. Sing.
 3. Make music.
 4. Give thanks.
 5. Submit to one another.

Singing is the sound of Christians unified in the Spirit as we join in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

- The early church, including the Ephesians, was composed of Jew and Gentile, united around Christ by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which they demonstrated in singing.

It is remains true today.

- A young US naval officer welcomed a young South Korean officer on board for training exercises.

Not everyone enjoys singing or can sing – Dad & Mom – “Joyful noise”

Ephesians calls for us to “*be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.*” When we sing we experience mutual submission at its best.

- We submit to a common tempo, structure, and rhythm - to a melody, harmony, and musical key.
- Stronger voices must blend with weaker ones to achieve a proper blend with each section contributing by singing its part.
- Sometimes we must sing pianissimo and sometimes fortissimo.
- Sometime even the sopranos must let the altos take the lead.
- The chorus wins when there is harmony. We sing our parts gladly, because it makes our song more beautiful.

When we sing together, we listen and respond to others. In an article informing this sermon, Steven Guthrie notes that sin turns in on itself. Being “subject to one another draws us out of ourselves to relationship with others.”

- Congregational singing reminds there are other people in the room. We are alert to one another.
- Singing reminds us that in Christian community there are other voices beside our own. Each has its own unique timbre and register. For our song to be beautiful, we tune our singing to each other for the sake of all who listen.

Garrison Keillor has an engaging monologue about singing. He says people can be intimidating but very few are when singing. Singing lowers barriers of pretense, sophistication, and distance.

- Often, the first singers we ever heard were our mothers, who sang to comfort and quiet us for sleep.
- Singing a hymn we have sung many times over the years has a different that reading a prayer of confession off the bulletin liturgy. Someone said singing a hymn is like from deep within, “I believe.”
- When we sing, we fully participate –heart, mind, lungs, and vocal cords. We give ourselves and let go in faith.

Doug Brouwer tells of leading worship in two congregations in central Pennsylvania - Mercersburg Academy and a tiny PCUSA church.

The epistle to the Ephesians instructs us to *“be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts.”* We do not need a large congregation or fancy sanctuary to do so. It doesn’t even require that we all have good voices. It just asks us to express love of God.

The call today is to SING! There are spiritual blessings in singing. When we sing:

- We learn and declare our theology.
- We put our whole selves, body and soul, into praise of God.
- We become a unified body in the praise and service of God.

SOURCES:

1. "United We Sing" by Stephen Guthrie in *The Christian Century*, January 11, 2012, p.27-29.
2. "Singing in a Presbyterian Congregation" by Douglas Brouwer in *PERSPECTIVES*, February 1992, p.11.
3. *Theological News and Notes*, Fuller Seminary, March 1992.
4. *Pulpit Resource*, Vol. 10, No.3.