

Do you ever get songs stuck in your head? I frequently do. Sometimes there good songs – the ones you want as a companion. These are the ones that make your eyes smile, your heart warm and put a bounce in your step. These are the ones that you want to keep singing over and over again. What are some of the songs you have as companions? Do you have songs from your childhood that you especially connect with? Over in Killarney, I Love You, Love Will Keep Us Alive, Rainy Days & Mondays, Sing, I could generate a long list songs that were a part of my life – both those that we call secular and those we call sacred. Music is important in our lives. And this is not a recent development.

Did you know that there are more than 1150 references in scripture related to music (melody, song, hymn, instrument, sound, play, blow, noise, psalm, harp, lyre, timbrel, trumpet, horn, voice). For reference, love is mentioned 310 times and there are 613 laws. Music is important to God and is important to us. No matter what anyone has ever told you – we are all called to praise God through music. Our central scripture for this series is Psalm 100 – which we read but we’re specifically going to look at verse 1 & 2 today, which say: “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. 2 Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing.” Now some of you have heard me say this scripture. You may even remember that I emphasis God says a

joyful noise. No where does God say it has to be beautiful – it says joyful noise – that means that what is most important to God is the feeling behind it! Verse 2 continues on with how we should serve God – with gladness (happy if you know it) and that when we come into God’s presence it should be with singing. When we celebrate communion, I say these words, “And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:...” There is music all around God – all the time.

But the music isn’t just bringing praise & joy to God and those who hear it our music forms our understanding about God. Christmas Eve of 2001 my whole family was together for the first time in several years. My parents had moved from California to Georgia and were still settling in. They did not have a church home yet and so the plan was to attend the Christmas Eve service at the closest United Methodist Church. We got there to find that everyone, but us were in pajamas, including the pastor. I struggled a little because we stood out. But what really got me frustrated was that we didn’t sing any of the beautiful Christmas Hymns until the end of the service. Instead they were a bunch of kids Christmas’ songs. I was in my second year of seminary and my family were all placing bets on how long before I blew a gasket. To my credit, I made it until we got in the car. 20 years

later looking back I can see that it wasn't all bad and communication was important. The pastor and Church were trying to create a safe environment for those people who had to go to Christmas Eve with their families to fulfil an obligation. What I wish the pastor had done was do that at the beginning and then use it as an opportunity to talk about who God was and the true meaning of Christmas. Heck, even show *A Charlie Brown Christmas* because Linus tells Charlie Brown the true meaning of Christmas. What frustrated me so much was that the pastor didn't dig into the words that have shaped our understanding and celebration of Christmas – whether through sermon or singing the hymns of our faith. Because make no mistake – we are shaped by what we sing!

Our opening hymn today was *He is Lord*. There are not a lot of words to this song, nor are they original – they're a direct lift from Philippians 2:9-11 *The Christ Hymn* that the Apostle Paul wrote to the good people of Philippi. Paul wanted people to know that Jesus was not just a man but God in the flesh. What's more the Apostle throughout the letter was trying to help the people know that God was not like the Kings/Emperors/ Leaders they were used to. How many leaders sacrifice their lives, let alone comfort for others. Paul, like the disciples before him came to know that Jesus was unlike any other experience.

This morning before the sermon, *Love Lifted Me* was the hymn chosen by the congregation. I had no idea what was going to be suggested but we all connect to this hymn – whether we're singing this for the first or the fiftieth time! We know those times when God's love for us, shown in so many ways, has been the only thing that saw us through the toughest times in our lives. Those times when we did not feel worthy of anyone's love let alone God Almighty.

In just a few minutes we will close our service with this beautiful song, *How Can I Keep from Singing*. The end of the refrain: *No storm can shake my inmost calm while to that Rock I'm clinging Since love is Lord of heaven & earth, how can I keep from singing?* Indeed how can I keep from singing. That's one of the things that has been so hard in this pandemic – something we've taken for granted was something dangerous. But there is power in singing. Maria knew that and helped the children frightened of the thunderstorm, by singing their favorite things. Music speaks in ways we cannot.

There are have been lots of studies about the way music helps seniors improve cognitive function. We've learned that unborn babies as well as young children benefit from exposure to music. Music is powerful. Monday, May 29, 2017 I sat with my mother in the hospital. I had sent my dad, sister & brother to go

eat breakfast and I told them I would stay. I sat in the room not knowing what more to say – I knew our time was short and I was at a loss. My sister-in-law texted me knowing this might be hard and suggested I sing to my mom. I didn't have my hymnal and couldn't remember the words to everything, but I sang verse after verse of songs that we had sung together throughout the years. I do not know my mom's thoughts but I know my heart had more peace. As I struggled with words to say the songs came more easily. Our challenge this week is increase the music in our lives so that we draw closer to God and let God's presence in our lives flow through us to those we meet. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.