

## Singing Sunday

“Reflections on Songs” by Stephanie Siemens July 28, 2019

### Reflections on songs in times of joy

How might we connect this scripture to songs in times of joy? I hope you'll indulge me as I share where my thoughts went. What jumps out at me here, is the rhetoric around bodies. It is not uncommon for Paul to refer to the flesh, or the body, in something of a negative light. But as I read this passage, I can't help but think “But Paul! Jesus had a body! How bad are our bodies, if God chose to take one on?!”

*In Christ, the fullness of divinity lives in bodily form.* Often our focus is on Jesus as God, and his humanity is secondary, at best. But he was truly one hundred percent human. He had a body like all of us sitting here [today](#), and it was *good*, just as ours are. I think this is one of the things that makes our Christian faith so beautiful, Jesus was just like us, and we need that. It is a great comfort to know that we have a creator that can relate to us on our most basic human level, and that human level, is *good*. Our bodies are good.

Every so often I find myself taken aback by the miracle that my body is. I know very little about the details of how bodies work, but I do know, that when I get hurt, maybe a cut, or a bruise, my body will heal itself. How incredible! When I open my eyes, I see beautiful things! And the taste of fresh summer fruits and vegetables is not only a delight to my tastebuds, but my body also uses them to give me energy for my day. And what joy comes from what my ears hear! Especially in this space, here, at Osler Mennonite and especially when we sing!

Our experience of music can be a profoundly spiritual one. These thoughts reminded me of the 12th-century saint, Hildegard of Bingen. It was in both a history class and a religious studies class that I learned a little about this groundbreaking visionary. One of her many contributions included the revalorization of women's bodies(which in medieval times were more demonized than they are now). She uses the metaphor of Jesus as the song of God, Jesus as God's music made flesh, composing the universe into melodious order. This is a musical Christology. And we, as God's children are made in the creator's musical image. She figured Satan is tone-deaf and had no musical bone in his body, and in her sacred musical drama, the character of Satan is the only one who doesn't sing. There are many fun facts about this fascinating woman that I would encourage you to look into, but for now, what I take from her is this beautiful metaphor of our bodies as musical instruments. When we speak of imitating Christ, often these imitations involve pain, such as the pain of bearing a cross, but through creating music with our bodies we imitate Jesus as the song of God. This is a much more positive bodily imitation. It gives our bodies value, and hopefully, great joy!

## Reflection on songs in times of sorrow

If you are as attentive as Loretta, you will notice that these verses were also read last week. I was inspired by Patty's message about Zephaniah last week, and I thought it to be highly relevant for [today](#), as we share songs and scriptures in times of sorrow. Certainly, there was no lack of sorrows that Zephaniah, the prophet, spoke out against in his day. As a reminder, Patty talked about how Zephaniah prophesied against those in power within the current social order. Those who take advantage of the down-trodden, those in power who oppress others, God will take away their power, and to the oppressed God says "I will bring you home."

We don't have to look far to become discouraged about our own social order. Together we mourn over the many injustices that exist in this world both far and near. Last Sunday marked one month since the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was stopped from being passed by the government of Canada, this on the same day as people across Canada celebrated National Aboriginal People's day.

War continues to ravage and destroy people's lives and the frequency of extreme natural disasters that the climate emergency has given way to, is hurting the most vulnerable among us. This is very very depressing. It pains me to hear that our children are inheriting these broken systems and this dying earth. In reading passages such as this one, from Zephaniah, I am reminded that God sits in that same sorrow with us. These injustices also pain our creator. God also desires that those who lord their power over others who are vulnerable, be divided from their power, and that oppressed peoples be raised up to find an existence that they might call home.

There are many many structural sins that exist in our society. Music and scriptures offer us a place to mourn together those injustices, but also to unite us and motivate us to make changes. In the face of social orders that reek of injustice, we have songs that unite us in our righteous anger and our desire for change. Protest songs, songs that challenge the status quo and social inequalities, these are just as sacred as any hymn, in my opinion. They speak truth to power and amplify the voices that oppressors try to stifle.

Through scripture and song, we feel less alone in our sorrow. This is one reason why music is such an important part of funerals for us. When we have no words *of our own* to offer comfort or to feel comforted by, we turn to a song we all know. Familiar words laid out for us that allow us to grieve together. And in our grieving together we also find hope.

## Reflection on songs in times of gratitude

Music offers us a way to show our gratitude to one another, and to God, in a deeper way. While we read the Psalms as prayers or as poetry, many of them were most likely originally written as songs. The Psalms are a great place to go to find reflections of every emotion, from joy, to sorrow to anger, to love, and Psalm 134 is a reflection of gratitude.

When we have immense gratitude for something or someone, words of thanks just don't seem to cut it. Sometimes we take time to write a handwritten note, perhaps even in a homemade card, sometimes we offer food as thanks, sometimes grateful tears and a warm hug are appropriate, and sometimes we can't refrain from bursting forth with a joyful noise. This is me as I bike to work on a gorgeous morning that feels like a gift from the Creator, I just start making songs up as I pedal along.

And music itself can be a gift. One of the most meaningful gifts I've received is a farewell song, written for me by a dear friend who shared it with me before I left for a year-long trip. For all the ridiculous songs I've made up as I ride around on my bike, those are gifts of songs to the creation and the Creator that inspires me, and perhaps unintentional gifts to anyone who might be listening through open windows. Every time we gather here together and sing, we are giving one another that gift as well. Raising our voices together in joy and sorrow and gratitude is a collective gift we offer to each other, and by doing so we find ourselves answering the call to imitate Jesus, the song of God, God's music, made flesh.

And so, for all the many gifts God has given us, including the gift of music and scripture, let us use our bodies as instruments to make a joyful noise to the Creator of it all!

**Benediction:**

*Don't Hesitate*

By Mary Oliver

If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don't hesitate. Give in to it. There are plenty of lives and whole towns destroyed or about to be. We are not wise, and not very often kind. And much can never be redeemed. Still, life has some possibility left. Perhaps this is its way of fighting back, that sometimes something happens better than all the riches or power in the world. It could be anything, but very likely you notice it in the instant when love begins. Anyway, that's often the case. Anyway, whatever it is, don't be afraid of its plenty. Joy is not made to be a crumb.

- Please note, if you are interested in the life of Hildegard of Bingen, the German film *Vision* (2009) is very well done.