

Psalm 100

The Soundtrack of Our lives

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Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

² Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into the Lord's presence with singing.

³ Know that the Lord is God.

It is God that made us, and we belong to God;^[a]
we are God's people, and the sheep of God's pasture.

⁴ Enter God's gates with thanksgiving,
and God's courts with praise.
Give thanks, bless God's name.

⁵ For the Lord is good;
The Lord's steadfast love endures forever,
and the Lord's faithfulness to all generations.

*Title Slide

On our first date, John and I met at Buffalo Wild Wings for dinner. When I arrived, he was eagerly awaiting my company. After I was seated and we exchanged pleasantries, he asked, "What were you listening to on the radio on the way here?" I thought it was a brilliant conversation starter for a first date. I don't remember how I answered the question but I am certain I was listening to a sappy love song. And I don't remember what he answered...clearly it wasn't a deal breaker, although since then, I've learned there are things he likes to listen to, that should have been deal breakers.

What would someone learn about you by asking that question?

*"What were you listening to on the radio on the way here?"

Music is the background for pretty much everything we do. In our offices, music plays through speakers all day long or some of us put earbuds in while we work. Music is on in the car as we travel. Some of us have lived through the days of listening to our offspring's favorite songs, blaring from his room over and over. Music keeps us company while we cook, clean, mow the yard, work out, and recover from a broken heart. Music speaks to our souls and connects us to times and places and feelings. And music connects us to God.

*In her book, *The Holy Profane: Religion in Black Popular Music*, Teresa Reed, Professor of Music at the University of Tulsa, wrote, "Music is intrinsically spiritual, the sacred is intrinsically musical, and both music and the divine permeate every imaginable part of our lives." God is in us and all around us...music is in us and all around us.

Music has been part of worshipping deities since the beginning of worshipping deities. Psalm 100, which I read earlier, is a hymn of praise and thanksgiving, honoring God's goodness. It is a summons to worship the God of Israel. In the context of our order of worship, it would have been sung as an opening hymn, just as we sang *All Creatures of Our God and King*. If you went to church as a child, you may have learned that King David wrote all of the psalms. That's not true. The psalms are a collection of hymns, poems, and prayers, undoubtedly written by quite a number of people in many different time periods. What I find more fascinating than who wrote which psalm and when, and even more fascinating than how each psalm was originally used, is the formation of the book of Psalms as a whole.

*The book of Psalms is also known as the Psalter. The formation of the Psalter was a lengthy and complicated process. Individual songs and prayers were written, some of them used over and over by worshipping communities. The ones with real staying power were gathered together into small collections, added to other smaller collections and eventually formed the whole. Psalms 1 and 2 were meant to be an introduction to

the whole, and were added late in the process and Psalms 145-150 were tacked on to the end as final high praise to God. The Psalter is truly a stand-alone book and has even been bound as such. Early in the sermon series, I mentioned that if you haven't been much of a Bible reader in the past, the psalms are a great place to start. It's true...no matter what you are feeling, you can find it in the Psalms. And one more thing, when we refer to one of the psalms, like Psalm 100, we use the word "psalm", not "psalms." The title of the book is Psalms. Each part of the book is a psalm. And while we are going over how to say things, the last book of the Bible is called Revelation. It is not Revelations.

The book of Psalms represents centuries of corporate worship and individual prayer and devotion. The deep emotion we read about in Psalms reminds us that our emotions are not new or unique to us or this time period. These sacred words connect us to their writers, to the ones who have read and sung them before us, and to the God that makes us one.

The same is true for songs outside the Psalter of course...the ones played on the radio, published in our hymnal, and imbedded in our memories of every stage of our lives. The lyrics of that sappy love song still remind me that I was not the first to be "lost in love" with a cute guy or gal. And the lyrics of that protest song remind me that I am not the only one to think war is "absolutely good for nothing." Music is, indeed, the soundtrack to our lives.

This is one of the reasons I think using music from many traditions, sacred and secular, classical, folk, pop, jazz, and even rap, in worship is a good thing. If we believe God is in us and in everyone else, and that God is all around us, it makes sense that all creative expressions would be ways in which we can connect with God. Our summer sermon series is focused on that connection with God and experiencing new ways of expressing our spirituality. As we have tried out new spiritual practices,

music has enhanced some of them. Today, we recognize, though, that music is its own holy habit.

In their book, *Who's Got Time? Spirituality for a Busy Generation*, Teri Peterson and Amy Fetterman suggest a number of ways, in addition to corporate worship, to draw near to God through music. One of the things they suggest is creating playlists. Many of us already have playlists for exercising or studying or cleaning. The authors suggest we create playlists for different needs, moods, and feelings. Need to feel peace? Put together a list of songs that calm you down and slow your heart rate. Studies have shown that music with 60 beats per minute is just the ticket---physiologically, our bodies adjust to the music. Think Otis Redding's "Sittin' on the Dock of the Bay." Perhaps you don't want to feel at peace. Maybe life's injustices have stirred something in your soul. Make sure you have a righteous anger playlist. A little Bob Dylan, Rage Against the Machine, U2, and Bob Marley are some options for that one. And don't forget a playlist for when you feel alone in the world. Make sure it includes the songs that bring back memories of shenanigans with your college roommate, your weird uncle's favorite song, or that hymn or worship song that reminds you there is more to all of this than the here and now. "Open yourself to the power of the Spirit who is the bringer of peace, the seeker of justice, the creator of community." (Peterson and Fetterman, p.41)

What would a playlist of your spiritual journey sound like? Which songs tell your story, as a child, a teen, a young adult, a parent, an empty nester, and all the ages and stages in between? Would your childhood song be something like "Jesus Loves Me" or maybe you and your family spent Sundays at the ballpark and your song would be more like "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." I remember vividly that my song as a 6th grade, adolescent was "My Life" by Billy Joel. The chorus goes like this:
*I don't need you to worry for me 'cause I'm alright.
I don't want you to tell me it's time to come home.*

I don't care what you say anymore this is my life.

Go ahead with your own life leave me alone.

I still these words helpful in the moments when I want to look at someone and say, "You aren't the boss of me."

Anybody else have a teenage angst song that comes to mind?

One song that is speaking to some teens today is "Youth" by singer and songwriter, Shawn Mendes. The lyrics say volumes about how young people experience the world.

Here I am, stuck on this couch

Scrolling through my notes

Heart was broken, still not growing, nah

Waking up to headlines

Filled with devastation again

My heart is broken

But I keep going

Pain, but I won't let it turn into hate

No, I won't let it change me

Never losing sight of the one I keep inside

Now, I know it

Yeah, I know it

You can't take my youth away

This soul of mine will never break

As long as I wake up today

You can't take my youth away

If you want to learn about someone or a group of people, listen to their music. I guess it turns out, my husband is a wise man.

And you know, we can write our own music. I would guess many of you have unofficially composed your own songs...maybe singing a favorite

tune with different lyrics to your pet or spouse? Beyond that kind of silliness (silliness is holy, by the way) I have found that writing new lyrics to favorite hymn tunes, or any tunes, is a meaningful spiritual practice. Take your favorite hymn and write a new verse.

I invite you to share your compositions with me anytime! Hymns and songs are most meaningful when we are singing what we feel and what we really believe.

*Rap musician, actor, and songwriter Ice Tea offered this wisdom about the importance of music in our lives “I think music always has the power to change, heal, bring understanding, and bring people together.” There is some science behind his claim. One example of that is in Grammy winner and songwriter Imogen Heap’s “The Happy Song,” which has been proven to make babies happy. Psychologists Caspar Addyman and Lauren Stewart, along with Felt Music, collaborated with Heap to produce the song. 1,000 parents also signed up to work on *The Happy Song* project. They named noises in a survey that made their own babies cheerful. As a result, only the most popular noises made it onto the track. Sneezing was first with 51%, baby laughter was second with 28%, and animal sounds took third at 23%.

The Happy Song is relatively short, about two and half minutes long. It takes babies on a melodic journey of cute lyrics and funny sounds. They include going up to the sky and down to the ocean, on a bike, submarine, and even on a rocket. Here’s a little of it:

*<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjpraGVs2Sg>

(play the beginning of the video through 1:03, I think you will hear/see the natural break)

Music is powerful. It connects us with feelings, memories, parts of ourselves, and the Holy. While singing pretty or making a joyful noise, writing our own or playing someone else’s, there is a good chance we will encounter something holy. Peterson and Fetterman remind us, “By entering into the song (be it your soul song or the universe’s song, or

just a good new single) you may meet the Source of song.” (Peterson and Fetterman, p.48) Wednesday at 7, you are invited to explore music as a spiritual practice further. Scott Taylor will lead the group this week.

In light of today’s topic and as we remember her contributions to making this world a more soulful place, I think it fitting to end with a few words from Aretha Franklin, “Music does a lot of things for a lot of people. It can take you right back, years back, to the very moment certain things happened in your life. It’s uplifting. It’s encouraging. It’s strengthening.”

Let music take you back, propel you forward, and accompany you as you live into the life God is calling you to. Amen.