

MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE

July 14, 2013

2 Chronicles 5:13; 1 Corinthians 14:15

Rev. Adrienne Carr

Our annual Hymn Sing Sunday is a wonderful reminder of the importance that music plays in our ability to express emotions within the context of worship. When Neil and I are on vacation, we often visit an area UCC church. I sit down in the pew, open the order of worship and check the hymn selections for that Sunday. If one or more are familiar, I feel like I am not among strangers; that I can share with them, my inner feelings through the words and the music of the hymns.

Isaac Watts, good Calvinist that he was, was dissatisfied by the church music of his day. He was unhappy with the metrical psalms that were traditionally sung because, it was felt, no music in worship other than the exact words of the Bible could be played. God would take offense

Finally, in frustration, Watts published a Hymnal with paraphrased psalms set to music. His work, identified him as a radical because he created a form of music that gave the human spirit permission to be emotionally and spiritually expressive. In his work, "Hymns of human composure," is a beloved hymn that has been sung by 300 years of worshippers. We can thank Isaac Watts for the paraphrase of Psalm 90 that we know and love: *Our God, Our Help in Ages Past*. With Watts, we sing of our absolute trust in God in our present moment and in all our moments: Let us sing.

Our God, our Help In ages past

Our God, our help in ages past, Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home

There are times when fervor is enmeshed in the words and music of a hymn. Julia Ward Howe, a dedicated abolitionist, had long believed that moral suasion would convince southern slave owners of the inherent evil of slavery. That hope died as the south seceded and war was declared. In 1861 as she watched Union troops march off to battle singing a stirring tune with words about John Brown, she decided to compose new words. The hymn that we know so well was for her and the Abolitionist Movement, an affirmation that God's truth and justice would prevail. "As Christ died to make men holy, let us die to make men free," she wrote, proclaiming God's inevitable victory achieved through the sacrifice of those who fought for freedom. With prayerful and hopeful hearts, let us sing of that time when God's truth will unite all humankind.

Battle Hymn of the Republic

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword;
His truth is marching on.
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!

Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
His truth is marching on.

There are hymns written from the struggling heart of the composer. William Cowper was an 18th Century English poet whose works focused on the beauty of nature but whose life long clinical depression included several attempts at suicide. John Newton, writer of *Amazing Grace* befriended Cowper and encouraged him during his dark times. Despite his pain, or perhaps because of it, Cowper wrote a hymn expressive of his belief in God's constancy and mercy. Words from the 3rd verse: "*the clouds you so much dread are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head,*" Despite all those clouds of darkness, Cowper felt the mysterious hand of God present in his life. Let us sing and let us also feel the mysterious presence of our God:

God moves In A mysterious Way

God moves in a mysterious way great wonders to perform;
God plants firm footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.

In 1934, between the two world wars, and just as Germany was beginning its embrace of Nazism, an American teacher, Lloyd Stone, wrote a hymn that expressed the yearning among millions for a universal peace. His emotional appeal to the human spirit to seek God's peace for all the nations was written to the evocative music called Finlandia.. Nearly 80 years after he wrote those words, We are still praying, still seeking that peace. Let us continue the prayer

This Is My Song

This is my song, O God of all the nations,
a song of peace for lands afar and mine.
This is my home, the country where my heart is;
here are my hopes my dreams my holy shrine;
But other hearts in other lands are beating
with hopes and dreams as true and high as mine.

Emily Dickinson wrote: *Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul - and sings the tunes without the words - and never stops at all.* The hope and the faith embodied in music is what this day is all about. When we can express our faith in the words of a beloved hymn, we find peace. When we can express our hope that despite all the pain and struggles of life, there is a loving presence that is constant and caring, how can we keep from singing:

My Life Flows On In Endless Song

My life flows on in endless song: above earth's lamentation,
I hear the sweet, though far off hymn that hails a new creation.
Through all the tumult and the strife, I hear the music ringing;
It finds an echo in my soul—how can I keep from singing?