

Music Sunday: That we may be one
John 17:20-26

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

Can anyone here quote to me any part of St. Luke the 2nd chapter? No! Okay what about quoting any part of Revelation 5? No Again! Does any one know what Simon peter said to Jesus in Chapter 6 of John, or what the crowds shouted when Jesus came to Jerusalem in Matthew 21 or what the John the Baptist declared Jesus to be in John chapter 1? I am sure you all know these things, your just being bashful.

Let's see, tell me if any of this sounds familiar: "Glory to God in the Highest and peace to his people on earth", words right from Luke chapter 2 and we use in our liturgy frequently as the Hymn of Praise.

How about this; "Worthy is Christ the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be the people of God, power and riches, and wisdom and strength, and honor and blessing, and glory are his" These are words taken right from Revelation chapter 5 and we sing it them also as the Hymn of Praise very frequently. And for that matter later on in the song we sing, "with all the people of God and join the hymn of all creation: blessing and honor and glory and might be to God and the Lamb forever, Amen." Again words right from Revelation chapter 5.

And again Simon Peter in John 6 says to Jesus, "Lord to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life!" Words we sing as a Gospel acclamation in our service once in a while.

Or the crowds sang in Matthew 21 words that were familiar to them found in another song, namely psalm 118, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" Hosanna in the Highest! Words we sing as part of our Sanctus in the communion service.

And according to John, chapter 1, John the Baptist, the day after Jesus is Baptized points him out of the crowd and says, "Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." Words we sing to prepare ourselves to receive communion.

Now I am sure many of you knew these passages and now that I have reminded you they sound familiar, you just didn't know the chapter and verse they were from, but they are a part of our worship. And this isn't even mentioning all the other parts of our worship, the usage of Biblical words, stories and images written into countless hymns, other passages

used as part of the sung liturgy or words spoken right there in the invocation, blessings, words of institution, benediction, that all are taken directly from scripture.

Today we are taking time to remember the importance of music in worship and to thank our musicians and singers and leaders who use the gifts they were given by God to lift up the word and direct us in our worship of our Lord. From the earliest times music was used to express feelings and communicate emotions. The word of God is powerful but there are few times when the word preached can bring people to tears, but everyone here can think of songs that will move you to tear up. Certain songs that mean something to you, that bring back memories, hopes, and thoughts. Sometimes a song will make your spirit soar up to the top of the highest mountain or bring you down into the lowest depths of darkness. The right song at the right time will change your attitude, booster your courage, deepen your faith, and yes even teach you scripture, even when you don't realize it. Music has power to enrich us and guide us in our faith journey.

Even King David knew this 3000 years ago. He appoints the Levites, the people of the tribe of Levi, one of the original twelve tribes of Israel, as the keeper of the ark, to maintain and transport it, to care for it and honor it respectfully. Part of that care for the Holy Ark was to have singers and musicians play music before the ark in honor of God's glory.

The Historical books of the Old Testament detail the trek of the Ark of the Covenant. The very ark that Moses placed the two stone tablets of the Law into. This box was made of wood perhaps two feet wide and two feet high by four feet long. It was overlaid with Gold and two cherubim with angel wings touching were placed on the lid. This ark was viewed by Israel as the very throne of God on earth, the footstool so to speak of where God's glory touched the earth. It went before them in battle and won the day. It went across the Jordan river, and separated the waters so the priest and the army following walked across in dry land. It was covered always while be transported for fear of anyone actually looking on the very power of God. It was viewed by the people as holy, sacred, the very presence of God on earth.

But from the time of Moses and traveling in the wilderness, to Joshua's time and conquering the promise land, to the time of the Judges of Israel, the ark never had a permanent home. So after nearly 200-300 years the ark of the covenant was being transported to the holy tabernacle, the tent of worship, on Mt. Zion, in David's capital city of Jerusalem. Where the next King, King Solomon would build the temple with the ark in the finally placed in the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctum of the temple.

So as the Chronicler of History tells us in chapter 15 of our first reading, David knew the importance of this event, he appointed an entire people to be the ones who would raise the spirit of the people, to lead the music and proclaim the glory of God using songs, horns, trumpets, cymbals, harps and lyres. Raising loud music to the Lord in honor of this blessing given by God to his people.

From that point on the Levites become the worship leaders, guiding the people in worshipping and paying homage to God. To make sure we respect and honor God, to show God glory due his name. And down through the ages we have had people lead us in music, singing and praising God.

Jesus in our Gospel reading even is praying at the end of that final night before he is betrayed. He raises up prayers on behalf of those who believe and those who will come to believe and now in our Gospel reading he finishes his prayer asking for the unity of his disciples and that God be with them. In several of the Gospels it says that after this prayer, the disciples sang and hymn and then went out into the night, towards the garden and the darkness of Good Friday. But note again they sang a hymn before going.

Paul also reminds us the importance of singing hymns. He tells us to follow the Lord, wearing our faith, clothing ourselves in God, and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. He wasn't just writing these words, but he lived it. In Acts 16 we are told a story where Paul and Silas had been imprisoned and beaten. Around midnight they were in the prison locked away singing and praying to God with other prisoners listening when an earthquake from the Lord opened the cells and freed them leading to the conversion of the jailer and his entire family.

Songs and Music have power. From the times of David, dancing and singing before the ark of the Lord, to the disciples singing before heading out to the garden of Gethsemane, to Paul and Silas singing and evangelizing while in prison, to this day the people of God are called on to lift a voice to God in song. Down through the ages songs have lead us to glorify God. May we give thanks this day for the gift of music and those who lead us in the song. Let us raise our voices to God and sing of God's glory now and forever. Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come.
AMEN.

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their needs.

Almighty Lord, you loved the world so much that you sent to us your Son, who came not to condemn the world but to save it. Through him you call us your own and your children now and forever. We give you thanks for this great gift, make us one in that family, with you as our head, call us to bear witness in all that we do and say, bearing witness to your everlasting power, until that day we stand with all those who have gone before, together as one people of your eternal home.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, Hear our Prayer..

O Heavenly Father, we ask that you come upon this place with your heavenly spirit. Enter here and rest upon us your servants to lift up your word, to sing your praise and welcome all into your fellowship. Transform us and empower us to be your servants in this time and place and send us out as your witnesses to all the world, sent with a mission of spreading your love and grace to our community and beyond.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, Hear our Prayer.

God, stretch out your saving hand to those who are sick. With your strong love, comfort the lonely, the oppressed, and all who suffer. Give courage to those facing surgery. Give healing to those who are afflicted. Give peace to those troubled both physically and mentally. Impart your Holy Comforter to be with them in their times of need. Especially we remember today our hospitalized, our homebound and all those we name now in our prayers to you....

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray for your creation. The world exists in the fallenness of sin and have turned from you, and we face hardships and destruction, war and violence. Continue to inspire all people to turn back to you and to return to your ways. Lift up all those who need comfort this day Lord, comfort from sickness, disease, and famine, those facing hardships of disasters or floods. Be with those fighting for justice and for peace in all the world against oppression, hatred and greed. Grant your Spirit of Peace and Hope to all people of this world so that we may see in you the glory of your creation.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, hear our prayer.

Into your hands, O Lord we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.