

Sing “Together”

August 19, 2018

Our Savior’s Way
Worshipping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM
Pastor Mann

It’s good to be back. Over the last eight weeks I’ve traveled a lot—from Virginia to the West Coast, from Haiti in the Caribbean to the Luther lands in Germany. I’ve had the chance to worship in many different churches—but I’m glad to be back in this church—Our Savior’s Way. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to spend this time away.

The theme this summer is “Together” and today we want to talk about “Singing Together.”

Have you ever thought about how pervasive music is? From Walmart to the Kennedy Center, from automobiles to elevators, from busy city streets to jungle drums, music is central to the human experience. Last week I was in Eisleben the birthplace of both Martin Luther and Johann Sebastian Bach. I was in the St. Thomas Church in Leipzig where Bach was the organist. I saw the statue of Felix Mendelssohn that the Nazi’s tore down because although he was a baptized Christian, his father was Jewish, I listened to Mozart in Salzburg and sang songs from “The Sound of Music” as we visited the locations where the movie was shot. Do you know, I actually shed a tear when we started singing “Doe a deer.”

Years ago, musicologists discovered that certain kinds of music produce predictable responses in people. Slow, peaceful music actually has a physiological effect. Our heart rate slows down, our digestion is stimulated, and our saliva glands become more

productive. Then some advertising guy decided to play slow music in grocery stores. They found out that people took more time walking down the aisles. They stayed longer. They bought more food. Then someone discovered that you can remember information better when it is set to music. So, an advertiser came up with this: “Oh, I wish I was an Oscar Meyer Wiener that is what I’d truly love to be. ‘Cause if I was an Oscar Meyer Wiener, everyone would be in love with me.” If you think about it, you can see how amazing that little song is. It is an incredible mingling of hotdogs and narcissism through the power of music. In Montreal the city government was trying to solve the problem of gangs of teenagers loitering in public parks. They started piping in classical music. It worked. The teenagers left. And there is, perhaps, no greater testimony to the power of music than the fact that, when a repressive regime comes to power in a country, what is one of the first things they try to do? They try to control what kind of music the people are permitted to listen to. We even choose which church, or church service, we are going to attend based on the music.

I want to share with you a few stories about music. For the past two weeks, Sally and I have been traveling through the Luther lands in what used to be East Germany. Martin Luther loved music and wrote over 40 hymns. One of them, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God”, was written, in Wartburg Castle. The castle towers over the town of Eisleben. Luther spent almost a year hiding out in this fortress. Here is where Luther translated the entire New Testament from its original language—Greek—to the language of his people—German. Luther express his faith through music—“A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing.” Luther said, “Next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world.”

One of the places we stopped last week was the Mittelbau-Dora Concentration Camp where they built the V-1 and V-2 rockets. The prisoners there worked underground. So, we were led into these tunnels under the mountain. All I remember about that day was that it was dark and damp and very cold. I remember a story about some American POW’s in a Japanese prison camp in 1944.

The conditions in the camp were brutal, inhumane and really indescribable. But one of the prisoners was a guy from Illinois. He would hum as the prisoners were led out to work. One day he started humming “America the Beautiful.” The Japanese guards didn’t know the tune so it meant nothing to them. But to the other prisoners is evoked images of home—of amber waves of grain and purple mountains majesty. Soon all the prisoners were humming the tune every day when they went out to work. The guards remained ignorant of this act of defiance. All they could do was wonder why the American prisoners seemed immune to the terrible conditions of the camp.

In 1964, more than 100,000 people packed themselves onto the Mall between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial. They had traveled for days, by car, by train, by bus, to get there. Their goal was to end racial discrimination and segregation. What did they do when they stood together on the Mall? Led by Marian Anderson, they sang “The Battle Hymn of the Republic”—“My eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.” They stood together and sang—one in heart and soul and mind.

In the spring of 33 AD, Jesus and his disciples shared a last meal together. With gentle hands, Jesus washed his disciples’ feet. He gave them the bread and the wine. “This is my body,” he said, “broken for you. This is my blood, shed for you.” His arrest was just minutes away. He could already feel the sting of the whip, the pain of the nails, and the sharpness of the spear. And what happened next?—Matthew tells us, “After singing a hymn they went out to the Mount of Olives.”

What do all these stories have in common?—Music! Music is powerful. A good song can teach you more about God and his love for you in two minutes than I can teach you in a year of Sundays. Listen to some of these words and the hope found in music.

“Above all powers, above all kings. Above all nature and all created things. Above all wisdom and all the ways of man. You were here before the world began. Above all kingdoms, above all

thrones. Above all wonders the world has ever known. Above all wealth and treasures of the earth. There's no way to measure what You're worth. Crucified, laid behind a stone. You lived to die, rejected and alone. Like a rose trampled on the ground, You took the fall and thought of me—above all.”

“Just as I am without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me. And that Thou bidst me come to Thee. Oh, Lamb of God, I come, I come.”

“God of wonders beyond our galaxy, You are holy, holy. The universe declares Your majesty. You are holy, holy. Lord of heaven and earth. Early in the morning I will celebrate the light. And when I stumble into darkness I will call your name by night.”

“Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found. Was blind but now I see.”

The Bible tells us to sing. Paul writes: “Speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.” (Ephesians 5:19)

I would like you to remember two things from today: First, sing! In time of joy, sing. In time of sadness, sing. When you are grieving, when you are celebrating, when you are riding in the car or going for a walk—sing! Second, no one song or style of music is better than any other. I can worship God when I hear Bach's “St. Matthew's Passion.” I can worship God with Mercy Me singing, “I Can Only Imagine.” God has given us all kinds of music to praise him. And it's all appropriate for worship. (Except, maybe, country music.) So, sing.