



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The Twentieth Sunday After Trinity October 21st, 2007

✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠

**“...be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”
Ephesians 5:18-19**

Ralph Martin in his book, *Worship in the Early Church* wrote, “The Christian Church was born in song.” We are a singing people. The reason we sing is because the realities of God and Christ, creation and salvation, heaven and hell are so great that when they are truly known and deeply felt, they demand more than discussion and analysis and description; they demand poetry and song and music. Singing is the Christian's way of saying: God is so great that thinking will not suffice, there must be deep feeling; and talking will not suffice, there must be singing.

What I want to do this morning is take several verses from our epistle and make six brief statements about singing in corporate worship, which is what this text is about. I will only state them as a kind of outline for a basic theology of music in our worship but I hope you will take them and turn them into reality here at St. Stephen's.

1. Singing is to be an expression of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Singing flows out of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Christian singing is not natural, but supernatural. The Holy Spirit comes and fills his people and moves them to act in certain ways. So Christian singing in corporate worship is to be the expression of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. That's the first thing to say about it.

2. Singing is to be from the heart. The opposite of "singing and making melody with your heart" would be singing and making melody with your mouth and whatever willpower it takes to make the mouth move. But "with your heart" signifies that you mean it and

that you feel it. The essence of Christian worship is not mere liturgical actions but an inner, authentic valuing of God in the heart.

3. Singing is to be "to the Lord." Now I am aware that the verse begins with "speaking to one another..." and I will get to that in a minute. What is remarkable is that both are true and they are true in this one verse in the same singing: sing both to one another and to the Lord.

"To the Lord," means that worship is to be God-centered but not just God-centered in that everything in worship relates to God, but also God-centered in that everything in worship is done toward God--in the presence of God, with a view to God's hearing it and seeing it, with a desire that God receive it into his hearing with approval and delight. When you sing, whether you are singing directly to the Lord ("Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts...") or whether you are singing indirectly to the Lord ("A mighty fortress is our God..."), sing with a focus on the present hearing of Jesus and the Father.

4. Singing is to be undergirded by a deep, Biblical theology of God's sovereign goodness. Why do I say this? Because in verse 20 Paul says, "...always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father." Now giving thanks for all things is an outrageous idea unless you have a deep, Biblical theology of God's sovereign goodness.

However it is that we may thank God for even horrible circumstances, it is not in the same way we thank him for healing and salvation and holiness. Yet, there is, I think this text points out, a way to see in all things the hand of God moving for the glory of his name and the good of his people. And what we need is a theology that is deep and Biblical enough that we can hate and repudiate and oppose the evils

of the world, and not cancel out the truth that in these very things and in our very hating of them, and working against them, and patiently enduring in them, there is also a ground for thanks (Romans 8:28; Genesis 50:20).

I say that our singing needs this deep, Biblical theology because this text on singing calls for such thanks, and because there is not a week that goes by in this church but that some people are dealing with horrible and painful things. There is a deep way to worship God with those people that quietly bears their burden with them, and quietly leads them to the all-sufficient God who is working for them in and through it all. Understanding this and believing this makes for the greatest of all congregational singing.

5. Singing is to be to each other. Here is one of the clearest mandates for corporate worship in the New Testament. You can't obey this in solitude my friends. God calls us to speak in song to one another.

This has at least three implications for us. One is that we should get together and sing as a congregation. The second implication is that it is justifiable that many of our great hymns are addressed not to God but to each other. "O Worship the King," "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name," "Crown Him with Many Crowns." The third implication is that the choir can speak the word to us in song and we can hear this and say "Yes" and "Amen" to the glory of God. God means for us to hear each other pray and sing so that there can be corporate responses of agreement - "Amen." Being together and singing to each other, and not just alone, intensifies our emotions for God, communicates our witness to God, and unifies our corporate life around God (Romans 15:6).

6. Finally, singing is to be varied in its forms (psalms and hymns and spiritual songs). Now there is a reason for different kinds of music. The main reason is that God is infinitely varied in his beauty and he relates to us in profoundly and wonderfully different ways. He meets us in lowly and meek ways. He meets us in thunderously glorious ways; he meets us in quiet, intimate ways. He meets us in complex ways and simple ways, furious ways and merciful ways. If you experience God in the death of your four daughters and your wife, in the sinking of a ship, you may write, "It Is Well with My Soul." If you are overwhelmed with the truth of the incarnation at Christmas time, you may write "Joy to the World." If you are stunned at the marvel that you are saved, you may write "Amazing grace!" If you are a Sunday School teacher longing to teach your students profound things in simple ways, you may write,

"Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. . ."

There are aspects of God's character and relation to us that can only be expressed with high and fine expressions of music like Handel's Messiah, and there are aspects of God's character and relation to us that can only be expressed with more common and folk-like kinds of music like "Amazing Grace" and "Just a Closer Walk with Thee," and "The B-I-B-L-E."

My pastoral exhortation is that we seek the Lord earnestly in all these things and go deeper with him in our understanding and experience of corporate worship each week. Pray for each other. Pray that we would be filled with the Holy Spirit; that all our worship would be "from the heart;" that we would be radically God-focused and God-centered; that all would be undergirded by a deep, Biblical theology of God's sovereign goodness; that we would provide the most helpful ways for you to speak to each other with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, and that we would embrace the variety of music and singing that is most helpful for our cultural setting and our great God.

To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.