

Community Church of Issaquah

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The Music of Our Hearts

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If there is one common thread that we all have in life, it is the presence of music. From the radio in our automobiles, to the music we play on our computers, to the background music we hear everywhere we venture, it is present in our lives. Like many of you, I can recall evenings spent watching such things on TV as Lawrence Welk, the Gaither Family, and more. As a high schooler I would run home after school so I would not miss Dick Clark and American Bandstand that began every weekday at 4 pm. I was even a regular dancer on a Jackson, Mississippi program called Teen Tempos. Music, even aside from my many years in the band, has always had an important place in my life.

Though it has changed dramatically from the days when we could actually understand and memorize the lyrics, music has an enormously large place in our lives. Often, we don't even pay much attention to it, but it is ever present. Do you remember the term "elevator music?" Well, we don't hear it in the elevators so much as we would hear it in department and grocery stores today. Imagine your response when you walk into a coffee shop in October and the overhead music is Christmas carols.

Music within the church is just as powerful and meaningful to us, and our history of being a part of church

activities. From our days at youth camp when we sang all the fun choruses to our days of solemn services where the music was intended to cause us to pause and pray, music was and is a huge part of our faith. Even though much of the music we play or sing in church doesn't have a very long history, we cherish it and thrive on it.

When we look deeply into the Scriptures, we find the mention of music as far back as the first book in the Bible, Genesis. In Genesis chapter 31, Jacob is admonished for his actions by Laban who tells him that if he had been truthful, he would have departed for his homeland with "singing to music of tambourines and harps." When I read that, it dawned on me that from the beginning of the people of Israel, there had been music. At some point in those early days, someone had created a tambourine and a harp. Amazing! From the beginning of time. Music.

Even Job in his struggles talks about singing to the music of the tambourine. It impresses me that in his dire depth of turmoil, he would still sing to the Lord. Like today's Call to Worship, we often read the words of a Psalm as more poetry or creative writing or prayer than its original creation as a song, which is what the word 'Psalm' means. David (and perhaps others who might have written some of the Psalms) wrote the words that were often the source of music. It is difficult for us to convert the words we read in that book of the Bible to some form of music, but it was done as a tribute to God. Wouldn't you like to sit through a service where someone sings the entire 119th Chapter of Psalms and all its 176 verses? I might have been tempted to doze off.

But the Psalms are full of references to music and there is a newness of instruments that were used. Harps, cymbals, ten string lyres, pipes – it seems like an orchestra accompanying those called to sing unto the Lord. Today, we certainly have a multitude of instruments to enhance our gifts of music in our church and more. Not the least of those is the piano. Though only a few centuries old, the piano and the organ have become the background for the music of most of our services. One of the difficulties I found when I once visited a Friends or Quaker church service was the absence of any instrument and the call to sing unaccompanied. I admire them and other churches who can do that.

In our faith tradition, we rely deeply on those who have been given the gift of music to lead us and help us make worship more meaningful. Here at Community Church of Issaquah, we have been enormously blessed to have someone sitting at the piano making our services so very beautiful. Our Music Director, Velma Walker. By the way, did you know that even in the Old Testament days, there was someone who was called Director of Music? Let me read from the book of Habakkuk which ends with this verse:

“The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights. For the director of music. On my stringed instruments.”

I don't mean to sound disrespectful, but why was there a director of music long before there was a pastor? I'll have to ask someone about that when I get to the Pearly Gates. Perhaps we often take for granted the importance music has been and still is in our worship of the Lord. Isn't your heart lifted each service when we join together to sing a hymn or to listen to our pianist play music. There's that word again – music. I am always touched when I hear the stories behind the hymns we know and sing. I often forget that every page of our hymnal has a very distinct story based on the life and work of those who wrote the words or the notes. The first time I heard the story behind the hymn "It is well with my soul," I cried.

A man inspired by God as he sailed over the site where his wife and children had died in a sinking ship. Yet he was inspired to write about his belief that his life would continue and inspire. Is that the only hymn or piece of music that has a story? No. In addition to the story behind every piece of music we sing or is played, there is a story of the one either singing or playing. In this church alone, we have been tremendously blessed by those who have felt God's calling and acknowledged the gracious gift each has received of being talented in the world of music.

Look around. In addition to Velma, there's Dorothy, Allan, Judy, Duane, Loretta, Twila and more. Each one showers us with the gift of music. The message title today is "The Music of Our Hearts." It is a reminder that just as the Bible is full of those who loved to sing praise to God, we too have that privilege today. Does the music here in our services ever touch your heart? Does it remind you that

God seeks to speak to us in a multitude of ways? Believe me, as a pastor of many years, I am well aware that a sermon is only a part of a church service with every portion seeking the hope of speaking about God's grace and goodness.

James writes a message for all of us to hear that puts music into perspective in our Christian lives. He writes in the fifth chapter:

“Is any one of you in trouble? You should pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick: You should call the elders of the church to pray.”

There is perhaps no better illustration of what the work of the church should be. Praying. Singing. And from time to time, even preaching.

Today we are engaged in showing our appreciation to a wonderful woman who has given her life to the work of the Lord through music. As soon as I finish my portion of this service, we'll move on to a more joyful and fun time to celebrate our beloved Velma Walker. I trust that as we end the service and move to the reception portion of the day, you will think about your own words that you would like to give to Velma. You'll have that opportunity in just a few minutes, so prepare your hearts.