May 22, 2011

CHOIR RECOGNITION SUNDAY
“The Power of Music”
Homily: Rev. Patricia Farris

Psalm 150
Praise for God’s Surpassing Greatness
Praise the LORD!%
Praise God in his sanctuary;
    praise him in his mighty firmament!
Praise him for his mighty deeds;
    praise him according to his surpassing greatness!

Praise him with trumpet sound;
    praise him with lute and harp!
Praise him with tambourine and dance;
    praise him with strings and pipe!
Praise him with clanging cymbals;
    praise him with loud clashing cymbals!
Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD

We are a church that knows the power of music. We are a church that knows the life-saving, heart-pounding, tear-flowing power of music. We are a church that knows the high-soaring, God-praising power of music. True to our Methodist heritage, we know that for all the power of the spoken word, it is as often the music of our worship that opens us to the saving, grace-filled, resurrecting power of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Annually, we set aside this Sunday in May to thank all our musicians for the time and the effort they put in, week after week, sharing their God-given talents with us through
music. More than a few of them point out to me each year that it’s rather ironic that on the very day we thank them, we ask them to work harder, to sing and play more than ever in this service, so that this really is a service carried by music rather than by speech. I would say “I’m sorry,” but I’m not. And I know you’re not either. So be sure and take a moment to personally thank as many of them as you can catch at Coffee Hour so that they know how very much we love and appreciate them.

Last week we celebrated the wonders and signs God works through us as we share generously with all those in need. Today we celebrate the wonders and signs God works through the power of music. Descriptions of the early church often include a mention of them singing hymn, praising God through music, in the manner of the Psalms as we hear today. This was their heritage. “Praise God in the sanctuary with trumpet, lute and harp! Praise God with tambourine and dance. Praise God with strings and pipe and clanging cymbals.”

Makes me think of the “Directions for Singing” that John Wesley himself wrote and are found in the front of our hymnals. “Sing all,” he said. “See that you join with the congregation as frequently as you can. Let not a slight degree of weakness or weariness hinder you…Sing lustily and with good courage. Beware of singing as if you were half dead or half asleep, but lift up your voice with strength…strive to unite your voices together, so as to make one clear, melodious sound…have an eye on God in every word you sing…”

John and Charles Wesley well knew the power of music, to bring us together, to find harmony in place of discord, and to lift our eyes and our hearts above, to something much bigger and greater and more enduring than ourselves alone. Because in this way, God works wonders and signs far beyond any human limitation.

I believe that God does this in the world as well as in the church, usually just when it’s needed most. As tensions rise again about the way to peace in the Middle East, God created wonders and signs through the power of music half-way around the world in Palestine earlier this month. In Gaza, in that place of such suffering and violence, God sent music to heal, to bind up the broken-hearted, and to keep alive the embers of hope.

Crossing every line of allegiance and country and culture, the Israeli conductor, Daniel Barenboim, led an orchestra of two dozen of the world’s finest musicians from the Berlin Philharmonic, the Berlin Staatskapelle, the Orchestra of La Scala in Milan, the Vienna Philharmonic, and the Orchestre de Paris, to play Mozart on a make-shift stage to crowds that began cheering them the minute they walked into the hall.

Organized under the auspices of the United Nations, the new authorities in Egypt agreed to open the long-closed Gaza airport that they might land and be escorted in UN vehicles to the concert site. Older Gazans, fighting back tears, said they could not remember such a thing in their country where daily survival is a struggle. Culture of this sort, which so many of us take for granted, has long been unthinkable in the midst of the
violence. For many young Gazans, the conductor Barenboim was the first Israeli they had ever seen not toting a gun.

40 hours of travel for one hour of music. One hour of normalcy. One hour of beauty and hope. What a gift. As one of the musicians said of making music: it is “putting aside whatever differences you have to do the same thing in the same place at the same moment.”

On a smaller scale, perhaps, that’s the same miracle that happens here every week, and sometimes I know we become those who take it for granted. But it’s not. It never is. It’s a miracle every time.

The power of music, like prayer, puts aside whatever differences we have, so that, drawn together in love, we are “doing the same thing in the same place at the same time,” creating harmony, creating unity, creating beauty and through it all, giving thanks and praise to God. Many of you describe what worship is for you during your week: one hour of normalcy. One hour of beauty and hope. What a gift.

That is the power of music, through which God works wonders and signs, of life fulfilled beyond our imaging, and every week accomplishes abundantly far more than we can ask or imagine, towards life lifted-up, made new and made whole—for us, and for all God’s children.

Thanks be to God for this inestimable gift and for all those who make it real for us each and every time we come to this holy place.

Let us now thank all those who, week in and week out, share their love of music, with us all, assisting us in the worship God, forming us into becoming more fully human and more whole, and binding us together in the beautiful harmonies of God’s love.

The CHERUB CHOIR --Jan Ellis, Director

The CHILDREN’S CHOIR-- Janet Searfoss, Director

Fang-Ning Lim, **accompanist** for both the Children’s and Youth Choirs

**YOUTH CHOIR and YOUTH HANDBELLS** Patty Eskridge, Director

**AMADEVUS HANDBELL CHOIR--** Mary Crawford, Director

**Section Leader/Soloists**
Barbara Smith, Soprano
Erin Wood, Mezzo-Soprano
Dennis Parnell, Tenor
William Trabold, Baritone
And all the members of the **CHANCEL CHOIR**

**Special recognition of Florence Workman, long-time choir member**

**Assistant Organist**—Roger Daggy  
**ASSOCIATE ORGANIST**—Mary Gerlitz  
**ORGANIST**—Christoph Bull

**DIRECTOR OF MUSIC**—Dr. JAMES SMITH

Notes:

Michael Kimmelman, “A musical gift to Gaza,” NYT, May 6, 2011

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