

Devotional

While pastor David is taking some vacation time, he asked me to give the devotional for this week's issue of "What's Happening". It is definitely a blessed opportunity, and one that seems befitting for the time given that the upcoming Sunday morning service will be centered on music in worship. Having been a worship leader for quite some time now, I have found the many within the church who long to sing the songs of the season. Easter occurs once a year, and for this reason, it almost seems as if many of my peers try to cram every Easter song they can into that one service. I cannot say I am innocent of this, but thoughts towards consideration of the historical hymns and songs we have all surely grown up with certainly begs the question of the place of music and singing in corporate worship.

Growing up in the church setting, and with pastors for parents gave me plenty of opportunities to sing in front of the congregation. My very first special music appearance was singing with my family on an Easter Sunday 16 years ago. I remember being frightfully nervous before the service. We rehearsed one final time before walking over to the church, and as I became quite sheepish in singing out full-voice, my mother took notice. She pulled me aside and shared with me a piece of wisdom that I still hold close to me to this day. She told me, "When you are singing, Tony; you are not doing it for yourself, and you are not doing it for the congregation. You are singing to God and for His glory." When we sing in church, we are singing for God's glory. In a book from the theologian Karl Barth, he says

"The Christian church sings. It is not a choral society. Its singing is not a concert. But from inner, material necessity it sings. Singing is the highest form of human expression.... What we can and must say quite confidently is that the church which does not sing is not the church. And where...it does not really sing but sighs and mumbles spasmodically, shamefacedly and with an ill grace, it can be at best only a troubled community which is not sure of its cause and of whose ministry and witness there can be no great expectation.... The praise of God which finds its concrete culmination in the singing of the community is one of the indispensable forms of the ministry of the church."

One phrase from this passage that resonates me is Barth's admonition that singing is the highest form of human expression. I do not believe that Barth is signifying the expression of emotion (although singing is most usually emotive in nature); rather, it is an expression of the soul that signifies the unity of creation, and the unity of the body of Christ in which we are part. Music is a gift of God originating in creation. From its inception, "when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy" (Job 38:7), to its consummation, when "every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them" will sing to the Lamb on the throne (Rev. 5:13), creation is musical. Human music-making participates in the music of creation and reflects the order, beauty, and diversity of God's creation. It is the art form most suited to expressing the church's unity in the body of Christ. In this way, it is my hope and prayer that we may come together this Sunday to make a joyous noise of worship and praise that would bring glory to God and further unify this Body of Christ. All of this, so that we may draw nearer to Christ and to one another to in our pursuit to fully love the Lord, love one another, and make disciples of Jesus Christ here in Orrville.

Blessings,

Tony