

The Park Road Pulpit

Sermons from Park Road Baptist Church

Russ and Amy Jacks Dean, Pastors

Walking and Dancing and Talking and Singing

Psalm 96 and Mark 11.8-11a; 14.22-26

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Amy Jacks Dean



Anne Hunter Eidson bounded into my office this week with her arms loaded with books – “I can prove it! I can prove it!” she said, “Jesus did sing!” And then I could hear it – it was the sound of great rejoicing from Ministers of Music all over the land! It was at that moment that the creative wheels really started turning – “We should chant the Psalm!” she suggested, “just like Jesus would have done.” And then she started reading to me all that she had found about how the Scriptures would have been sung in the temple. I had only been able to locate two occasions where Jesus sang – and one of those was a little bit of a stretch. The two occasions of Jesus singing practically frame the Passion Week. The first is the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem at the first of the week, and my research says that the “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord” would have been sung. And yes, it does seem to be that the people are waving their palm branches and singing, but I just had to assume that surely Jesus, at the very least, would have been humming along. The second occasion for singing comes later in the week – toward the end – after they had eaten their Last Supper together and were headed out to the Mount of Olives (to Gethsemane) to pray. “When they had sung a hymn” they headed out to face what they too soon would realize would be the darkest moments of their lives.

I found this so interesting. What do we do in joy and in sorrow? We sing. It’s what the people of God have always done – perhaps even Jesus did this as well. When you don’t know how to say it, you sing it, and somehow the music speaks for the soul

when the spoken word is not enough and when silence just won't do. I can remember as a child of about 10 or 12 years old, on the fifth Sunday night hymn sing, always calling out the same one as my favorite:

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face,
and the things of earth will grow strangely dim
in the light of his glory and grace.*

It has kind of a melancholy sound, but I loved it. It warmed my heart. Ironically, in the moments of some of my most intense sorrow, the recessional hymn of the funeral for a teenage boy, always makes me smile:

*Standing on the promises of Christ my King, through eternal ages let his praises ring;
Glory in the highest, I will shout and sing, standing on the promises of God.
Standing, standing, standing on the promises of God my Savior;
Standing, standing, I'm standing on the promises of God.*

It was the worst day of my life.

In the midst of all triumphal entries and in the face of all gardens of Gethsemanes, we sing our faith. Or if we don't, maybe we should. For in the song, words are put to music so that something from deep inside is spoken – something I feel, something I believe, yet words are often not enough:

*(spoken) Come thou fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing thy grace;
streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet, sung by flaming tongues above;
praise the mount I'm fixed upon it, mount of thy redeeming love.*

I have been helped in my study this week by Wendy Wright, a professor and frequent contributor to a journal entitled *Weavings*. She says that singing is “one very powerful way in which we become re-made in the image of God, one way in which the Christ story enters our lives and becomes the narrative through which our own stories unfold. To truly sing a new song to the Lord is to open ourselves to transformation of the

most profound sort.” (*Weavings*, Volume VI, Number 5, September/October 1991, “Sing to the Lord a New Song,” Wendy M. Wright, page 6) She goes on to tell her story of being a natural singer and so her parents found a church with a big choir program and she started attending with her parents only coming for big music presentations. She says that during those formative growing up years that “the story and the hope that are the Christian heritage became intimately and irreversibly woven into the fabric” of her life. She says that during those years she “learned what it is to have the Word sung in me.” But then, as many older youth do, she drifted away from the church – in her case lured by musical theatres and clubs and commercials. But after the glamour wore off, she stopped singing all together. She ended up a little later in life finding her way back into the church, but this time just on the back row of the soprano section – enjoying more the camaraderie of the choir than the music itself. And then at the age of 30 she gave birth to her first child and then what some called the “baby blues” set in. But these “blues” simply would not go away. She felt empty and alone and afraid during what was supposed to be the most joyful time of her life. At about 6 months into this post-partum depression, she was asked to be the cantor for the liturgy at the 10:30 mass. Wendy Wright says, “I crept out of the back row of the sopranos and into my place behind the microphone. Aware that I had nothing to give beyond a trained voice and an anguished desire to reconnect with God, I took the job. And I learned – slowly, haltingly – that Christian prayer, although the most intimate of acts, is even more essentially, a shared experience. I could not “pray” myself . . . but I could sing. [She had taken the role of Jesus – just as he had been a cantor – now she would sing the ancient text.] And as I began to sing I learned to pray anew. The common music, the shared melody, the

hallowed and long-lived words all became the content of my prayer . . . I learned . . . to let my voice, my breath, my heart become the strings of the harp that carry us as a people to God . . . I learned that the . . . seemingly random events of my life, that my dyings and rising, when woven into the great Dying and Rising, become part of a magnificent cosmic tapestry. I was singing the Word and the Word was being sung through me, forming me into the image and likeness of God so that, indeed, I could sing a new song.” (pieced together from the *Weavings* article, pages 7-17)

A proverb from Zimbabwe says this; “If you can walk you can dance. If you can talk you can sing.” In this Lenten season, I pray that we do some more walking and dancing and talking and singing. May it be so.