

## **The Gift of Music**

**Psalm 96:1-6, 11-13**

**Music Sunday – Parkminster United Church – June 12, 2022**

What a gift music is – I've often thought of it as the soundtrack to our lives. It permeates our celebrations and our grief, it can challenge us, it can comfort us, it uplifts us, it inspires us, and it's a part of our every day.

I cannot imagine life without music. A former Music Director once said, that for him, "Music is like breathing air." His words always stayed with me. Music is, quite simply, that essential, as fundamental to life as breath is.

My parents have everything to do with my love of music. Some of my earliest memories involve road trips around the province in the summers visiting friends and family near and far. Before satellite radio and Spotify, I remember the sounds of familiar radio stations when we started off and later the search to find the perfect station as we ventured further into parts unknown. As a teenager, I was from the era of the Walkman and later the Discman and I would carefully select the perfect mix tapes and CDs to take with me to listen to as a way of passing the time as I watched the world go by from the car.

While my family wasn't overly musical, we loved music. I can remember my mother sitting in our living room at the end of a long day listening to her favourite music as a way to unwind. I would spend hours pumping the pedals of my grandparent's player piano, pretending I was the next great concert pianist. As theatre fans, we fell in love with musicals and their soundtracks. And as a teenager and beyond, there were countless concerts. Later as parent, children's music entered my brain as it so often does when played on repeat and countless Disney songs and others are stuck in the recesses of my brain. Just ask anyone with young children in their lives and they can probably name at least one if not more songs that are stuck on repeat. "Baby Shark" anyone?

As both a preacher's kid and now a minister myself, church music and hymns have also been a big part of my life. I can still sing songs from Vacation Bible Schools of years past. From the time I was just an infant I have been surrounded by talented and thoughtful music directors, musicians and choirs who have brought music to life in so many engaging and moving ways.

Music is indeed one of the foundations of our Christian life. It permeates our Scriptures, our liturgy, and our lives. Most ministers know that very few people will leave church on Sunday morning repeating the words of the sermon. But many will be humming the tune of one of the hymns. Music can have a profound effect on the experience of worship, in a very subtle but lasting way. Music has a way of connecting us into an even deeper relationship with God – as if God puts a song in our hearts.

Speaking of being the recipient of God's gift of music, let's talk about this church. This community of faith is and has been known, far and wide, for its amazing music. In fact, just last

week I received countless comments from those here for our joint Pride service and from the other Waterloo United clergy how blessed we are at Parkminster with such an incredible music program. One person told me, "I've been to a number of services many times over the years, and I always have been blessed by the music of Parkminster."

And so how can we talk about music at Parkminster without talking about Neil? Neil your versatility, talent, and enthusiasm for music is infectious. And that is further reflected by the incredible gifts and talents of those in our Voices United Choir, in the Cast in Bronze Bell Choir, in the Band, through choral scholars and talented singers and musicians from the congregation, through Celtic Crossing and countless guest musicians invited into this space. All of these incredible musicians, many of whom are here today, are using their gifts for the good of others – the essence of stewardship, by the way...Taking the gifts we've been given and using them for the good of others. So, thank you all – and thank you to the congregation who joyously raises your voices in song each week through our hymns. Thank you, Neil, and all, for using the gifts God has given you for benefit of others.

So why did God give us music in the first place? The scriptures highlight God calling people to sing, to make music with various instruments, to celebrate God's goodness and glory with song. But why? What's the point? Why not just pray a spoken prayer of thanksgiving or praise God with words? As a person of words, I reflected on this a lot as I prepared for this Sunday. As an English major who entered a vocation that is full of words, I have spent much of my personal and professional life as a purveyor of the written and spoken word, so I have a deep love and respect for the power of words.

But the older I get – and presumably the better I get at using words to hopefully inspire others – the more I have come up against the limits of mere words – both spoken and written. There are times, situations, and events where mere words just aren't adequate. The Apostle Paul talked about such moments in Romans 8:26. Paul said that sometimes "the Spirit intercedes for us in sighs too deep for words... sighs too deep for words..." It's important for us – especially those of us who deal in words – to learn to recognize when we are in one of those times or situations that are "too deep for words." As a minister, I continue to learn all about the recognition of such moments. When someone is sick, when someone is in pain, when someone is dying – or dealing with a loved one dying...these are all times when words never are enough. But music is another language altogether. Some of the most beautiful and humane deaths that I was present for involved music. One family made a playlist of their dying father's favorite songs and played that playlist at his bedside over and over during the final days of his life. Another loving person sang to her partner in their final moments on this earth.

Music has a deep and spiritual power. Martin Luther has said that "music is the art of the prophets and the gift of God." It touches us in places mere words never quite reach. It connects us deeply to the Spirit and to one another. Aretha Franklin is quoted as saying: "Music does a lot of things for a lot of people. It's transporting, for sure. It can take you right back, years back, to the very moment certain things happened in your life. It's uplifting, it's encouraging, it's strengthening." Jerry Garcia, the late founder and guitarist of The Grateful Dead, once said,

“Music, at its best, is all about transportation. We in the band think of ourselves as being in the transportation business. We move people from where they are to where they want to be...to a better place. Our music is all about transportation.”

Music is truly one of God’s greatest gifts. It is a gift that has been showered upon me, showered upon you and this entire community of faith, and showered upon a world that desperately needs to be moved from where it is to a much better place. On this Music Sunday, may we thank God for the gift of music. Amen.

*Rev. Heather Power*