

Community Days Hymnology Sermon
By Rev. Spencer Homan
Edited by Pastor Craig Ferguson

Good morning and welcome to Geneseo United Methodist Church Community days service of celebration. This morning we invite each of you to join in the festivities, sing along with the hymns, and stick around for the picture and some food. Now let us begin the service with a very traditional hymn.

Hymn # 71 – Glory be to the Father – 3-4th Century
(Ah Sound)

Now you may be saying to yourself, “what a funny way to start a service, why did we start by singing that song?” Many of you may associate that song as the doxology. Often it is sung after the offering is taken. But do we know why that is the tradition, what is a doxology?

Well, simply put, doxa in the Greek means the glory grandeur and splendor of God. So when we sing the doxology we are singing about the glory of God. But there is another reason today that we begin with that hymn. Have you ever wondered why there are so many different churches; why they all have different styles, music, liturgy? Today we are going to spend a little time looking at the history of worship through music, how hymns developed and what impact they make on our worship service.

As we worship today, I would like to give credit where it is due and point out that the service today was originally written by my pastoral friend Rev. Spencer Homan, whom many of you have heard preach. So if you don't like the service today, at least I have someone else to pin some of the blame upon. However if you do like it, it is ok to note that I did a fair amount of editing for the service here at Geneseo today.

Now, the first hymn we sang, whether you knew it or not was written sometime during the third or fourth centuries. (of course the melody we sang it to is a little more modern, in fact most of the ancient songs we have, have been molded to new tunes) It was originally sung without instrumentation as a way of beginning a worship service. It was considered a most important

thing to acknowledge the glory of God above and before anything else. Music was the primary way that was done.

Music is such an important part of a worship service. Music is a very amazing thing, it has the power to instantly transport us back in time.

You hear that *certain* song and you are instantly transported back to your first date, sharing that first dance... that first kiss. You hear that *certain* song and you are back driving in your first car with your best friend. You hear that *certain* song and you are back curled up on the floor of your parents' living room.

It is probably no surprise that music does the same thing for us in church. We hear a good old standard and remember our Grandparents, remember our parents, remember growing up in the church. We hear the hymns and feel like we are in a small rural church sanctuary where we remember looking up at the cross and seeing Jesus for the first time. We feel like we are a part of something that has been around a long... long time.

So... needless to say, whenever the church talks about introducing new music, new songs, new hymns, new styles... people get very uncomfortable. And rightfully so... we fear losing that part of the worship service that touches us in a very spiritual way, that helps us remember who we are and why we are here.

However... one thing that might surprise you... is that the same song you hold so dearly and so closely to your heart as a "good old standard" was once a source of great stress that almost tore the church apart. You see... the tension of change is not anything new. It is something we have been dealing with as a church for well over 1600 years!

Now we do not know a whole lot about the worship music during the ancient times, but what we do know is that they were simple songs usually accompanied by a harp, lyre, or lute. Yes folks, the first instrument in the church... was a guitar.

One such song that entered the Christian sphere on a stringed instrument in the 8-9th century was...

***Hymn # 280 – All Glory Laud & Honor – 8-9th Century
(Guitar Vs. 1 & 4)***

By the middle ages, the church had developed a rich source of hymns that closely resembled what we would call Gregorian Chanting today. One song, the words written by St. Francis of Assisi sang the praise of all God's creation.

***Hymn # 62 – All Creatures of Our God and King – 1225 A.D.
(Voice Vs. 1 & 2)***

However, by the 1400s, we have a lot more information, and the culture around the church was beginning to blossom with brand new music coming from... an organ! And a few worship leaders decided to use the passion and vibrance found in the popularity of organ music and bring it into the church. Well the Gregorian Chant people were simply outraged! That's not how we do things around here! If it's not a guitar... we don't want it!

But the mass popularity of the organ won the day, and soon almost every church had an organ... and we saw the birth of the first hymns as you and I know them today.

The 14 & 1500's specifically were a time where the Psalms were considered the only appropriate music to be sung in worship... after all... they are the only examples of music we have in our Bible. So, the Psalms were put to organ music and we had our very first hymnal. Lets take a moment now to glance back 500 years on a Hymn that was penned after Psalm 100:

***Hymn # 75 All People That on Earth Do Dwell – 1561
(Organ Vs. 1 & 2)***

This was also a time of great conflict in the church as the Protestant Reformation took place and the church split forming all kinds of new denominations. With these splits... also came new styles of music and two major new lines of thought: Those who believed in the regulative principle to hymns... that if it was not specifically from the bible (i.e. scriptural)... it was heathen and had no place in the worship service, vs. the group that followed the normative principle to hymns... believing that as long the words were in line with our beliefs they could be beneficial to our faith. They even went so far as to use allegory and metaphor! (Jesus would have

never done anything like that, haha) Let's hear now... an example from each of these camps... first... the regulative folks and a hymn based upon Psalm 23:

Hymn # 128 He Leadeth Me - Based on Psalm 23 – 1584
(Organ Vs. 1)

In contrast to the Regulatives... the Normatives used both words and music that many believed uncouth. One of the most famous hymns of the reformation was based a famous bar tune... a tune that all of the locals knew quite well from the hours spent at the tavern... a tune that was baptized and brought into the church by that rebel Martin Luther to give us one of our best known hymns ever.

Hymn #110 A Mighty Fortress Is our God - 1529
(Pipe Organ Vs. 1 & 2)

The new wave of music ripped through the countryside and caused quite a stir! A few churches were so offended by these bawdy hymns that they went so far as to tear the organ from their church... pipe by pipe... declaring it an instrument of the devil! However... the outrage didn't last terribly long and soon both styles became a standard for the church.

Let's fast forward again a few years to the 1600s. Here we find another growth spurt, when hymn writers began to ask the question... why must we only sing hymns that express our beliefs? Why can't we sing about our personal experiences? And so a new kind of hymn was born!

Hymn # 131 We Gather Together – 1625
(Organ Vs. 1)

Again we saw outrage as the words shifted away from our core beliefs and began to center on our feelings instead. I think it is possible that these hymns mark the first historical records of a man actually talking about his *feelings!* And that is one thing that we do as we bring to God our prayers.

Testimonies of Prayer

*The Sharing of Joys and Concerns
Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer*

Fast forward again a few more years... to the 1700s. Up until now... while the focus of the words in hymns have changed, the music for the most part... has sounded like a hymn. A very basic 4-4 time, very metrical in its singing... nothing fancy... nothing too uncouth! And then came Charles Wesley, brother to John and the unwilling co-founder of Methodism. He asked the question... well we can sing words that have great feeling and meaning... why can't we sing to music that has great feeling and meaning too!!! Thus we get great hymns like the one that has traditionally been the opening hymn in Methodist Hymnals.

*Hymn # 57 O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing – 1740
(Piano / Guitar Vs. 1 & 3)*

Out of this Methodist movement we get John Wesley's directions for singing first printed in 1761. They are listed in your hymnal on Roman numeral page vii. I will not read them all, but there are a couple that merit mention. Specifically number four which warns us to: Sing lustily and with good courage. Beware of singing as if you were half dead, or half asleep. Or number three which tells us to join the congregation as frequently as possible not letting weakness or weariness hinder us. Or number six which tells us not to sing too slowly, and number seven that says: Above all sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing him more than yourself, or any other creature. Hmm, words of wisdom when it comes to church singing that we could all learn from.

Fast forward to the 1800s, and we see that Charles Wesley's contribution to music was still making its ripple effects felt. His new kind of music was exciting indeed, and people flocked to hear these contemporary worship services! However, not everyone was impressed. In 1819 in England, one group specifically rebelled against this new style and took their case to the courts. The case was heard by the Chancellor of York who, in a typical Anglican compromise, concluded that the new hymns were indeed illegal in Anglican liturgy but, because their use was so widespread, he felt

entirely unable to enforce his decision! And the new music stayed! Some 70 years spent squabbling over Wesley's heretical music. Terrible... bawdy music like "Christ the Lord is Risen Today," "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus," "Rejoice the Lord is King," "Ye Servants of God," or even... dare I say it, "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing!"

However, his contribution... opened up the door to embrace the music of the culture and make it our own. And that is what we see in the 1800s, a renewed effort to embrace the music of the culture and baptize it for the church. And so, as we take time now to return God's tithes and our offering to God, let us listen to one of the most famous hymns that we all know.

Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound – 1831
(Jazz arrangement – Piano Solo)

Another very famous song that rose to the surface out of a very different culture began in merchant ships and cotton fields of the south. These songs, sung by the slaves as if a cry from their heart, without instruments, their voices clung to the hope of God as they kept their eyes focused on the eternal kingdom.

Hymn # 703 Swing Low Sweet Chariot
(Accapella Vs. 1)

Somewhere during this time Geneseo entered the picture. As a frontier church, they didn't have much for instruments. Most churches began in homes and sang hymns just like the slaves in the fields, from the depths of their heart. In fact, although most of us assume that every church ever built has had an organ in it from its very inception, for most frontier churches, it was actually a small battle to get them installed in the first place.

The United Methodist history book on the Iowa Annual Conference called, "Between the Rivers" includes a couple stories that I think deserve mention in regard to this thought.

During the pastorate of O.C. Shelton at Agency in 1854... a controversy arose over the installation of a small reed organ. One group was very much opposed to the idea. They were sure that

the devil would be let loose. Others prevailed, and the “wooden music” instrument was installed.

In another account, Michael See who had a circuit near Iowa City came to the church after a short absence and was horrified to find a small reed organ in the sanctuary. He promptly rolled it out to the wood shed and chopped it up with an ax. When people came to the church that evening, the service was opened by the normal “lining out” of the hymns as usual. Nothing was said about the organ. The one who had installed the organ must have had a guilty conscience... Opposition to musical instruments continued as late as 1900. (Pg. 25)

The 1900s saw much of the change, as popular music from places like “The Lawrence Welk Show” and the “Big Band” sound made its way into the church! Let me tell you... great great grandma rolled over in her grave when they brought a drumset into the church. But it brought to us music like this.

Hymn # 77 How Great Thou Art - 1949
(Big Band – Vs. 1)

By the 1970s, Christian music began to embrace the cultural sounds of “rock and roll” and a whole new conflict began arise. Christian Radio began to make its impact when people could listen to their worship music all week long and make it a part of their everyday lives. From this era, we got beautiful songs like this one.

Hymn # 593 Here I am Lord – 1981
(Piano / Guitar – Vs. 1)

However, many felt and continue to feel that this new music with its very simple 4-4 format and repetitive lyrics was at best... bubblegum for the brain! ... something that many new songwriters have been conscious of.

In the 1990’s Matt Redman was a worship director who felt the struggle in the lack of depth and sense of apathy found in “contemporary” worship, as his congregation struggled to find its meaning within its worship music.

“There was a dynamic missing, so the pastor did a pretty brave thing,” he recalls. “He decided to get rid of the sound system and band for an entire season, and we gathered together with just our voices. His point was that we’d lost our way in worship, and the way to get back to the heart would be to strip everything away.”

Reminding his church family to be producers in worship, not just consumers, the pastor, Mike Pilavachi, asked, “When you come through the doors on a Sunday, what are you bringing as your offering to God?”

Matt says the question initially led to some embarrassing silence, but eventually people broke into a cappella songs and heartfelt prayers, encountering God in a fresh way.

“Before long, we reintroduced the musicians and sound system, as we’d gained a new perspective that worship is all about Jesus, and He commands a response in the depths of our souls no matter what the circumstance and setting. This next song, was born out of that experience.

The Heart of Worship – 1991 ***(Guitar)***

Every century has brought its own conflict, its own style, its own emphasis... and today... all throughout our hymnal you can still see their fingerprints... you see... after all is said and done... it doesn’t matter what you are singing to, whether organ, piano, or guitar... it doesn’t matter if the words are scriptural or written about our feelings as Christians... it doesn’t even matter the style of music you sing... as long as we bring it into a house of worship... and it helps us to WORSHIP God!

With that I invite the kids to lead us in our last song, a song that they learned this week in Bible School, a song that speaks to their culture, and their language:

Made to Worship **(Kids)**

Now may the Lord bless you and keep you, may the Lord make his face sign upon you and be gracious unto you, the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen.

