

Take it up a Notch
Cooke's-Portsmouth

June 18, 2017

Psalm 100

How does one best describe the meaning of joyful noise? Perhaps the cacophony of sounds of children at play; high pitched squeals and giggles as happy children frolic around a playground or park. I would call the banter, chuckles and greetings passed during the sharing of the peace at the start of our service joyful noise. What exactly is being shared is indiscernible as the clatter of clicking tongues and greetings are exchanged. There is the clasping of hands, the embrace of a hug, the sharing of smiles and words of greetings that merges together into a din of welcome and comfort. I prefer to watch the interaction and to hear the noise crescendo as you rise and interact and then diminish as you return to your seats for worship. The lighting of the candle is the bridge that spans the informality of the pre-worship and the formality of liturgy. Unbeknownst and as a matter of routine we engage the wisdom of Psalm 100; making a joyful noise; entering into worship with gladness.

Before we sing our first hymn there is the unconscious acceptance that we are in community; that we comprise the sheep of God's pasture; sons and daughters of God together in the same place at the same time to make a joyful noise in worship: through responsive readings, singing of hymns and united in prayer. Worship should have decorum, but it does not need always need to be so solemn. I will concede that there are texts and times where the heart strings are tugged and we are moved to weep, or bow our heads a little lower in humility. But there are moments when worship needs to lift our heads and our gaze heavenward in sheer joy and celebration. I am

delighted that there is extra music this morning as Marcilia, Donna, Allison and Janice have all volunteered to share their talents with us. This is the perfect text to accompany their offerings. And when we read the headlines and are so readily reminded of suspicious politics, political posturing, testing of missiles, raging fires in apartment complexes that consume life and structure, people opening fire at places of business and sporting arenas and other acts of terrorism and inhumanity, we need music to lift our hearts and move our souls.

Steven Miller a United Methodist Minister tells the following story. The beginning days of vacation were comically disastrous. The first time the powering steering pump in the truck went out, we were fortunate to be in the parking lot waiting for the tow truck. The second time it went out we felt lucky to be only twenty miles west of the same town, waiting at the side of the road, staring at the beautiful scenery, taking silly pictures of each other. We laughed as we bounced along the highway in our little pickup truck secured by heavy chains on top of the tow truck. The third time the steering went (it is now the third day in the same town) the joy disappeared. When the transmission on the loaner vehicle we used to retrieve our second vehicle from home in order to continue our road trip refused to engage, it was time for simmering rage. My wife feared the worst-that I would not recover from this latest insult to my ego. Finally we were on our way in her ever trustworthy but too small car.

A favourite CD was playing as we continued on our journey-old gospel songs set to marvelous harmonies and arrangements. The scowl on my face softened as I recognized a song that my parents used to sing. My toe began to tap. My wife glanced in my direction. A smile was too much at this point, but I could feel the cloud lifting. I did not have the strength to resist the music. Joy would recapture me. Music is transformative and may be one of the surest ways to

inspire thoughts of God. It does not erase the drama of world shaking events or the sadness and shock in the wake of tragedy. But it may help to ground us; to steady us; to empower us.

I will confess to not having heard of Ariana Grande prior to the event that catapulted into my conscious. She is a singer and actress who was performing on tour in Manchester on May 22, of this year. At the end of the concert, a suicide bomber detonated an explosive in the foyer of the arena, causing 23 fatalities and approximately 120 injuries. Grande suspended the tour and held a benefit concert on June 4, at the Old Trafford Cricket Ground in Manchester, titled One Love Manchester, raising more than \$13 million to aid the bombing victims and affected families.

Justin Bieber, Katy Perry and other artists were among those who performed. At one point in the concert police who were there for security held hands and danced in a circle with young children in solidarity of hope; moved by the music to embrace life, love and the future.

If you will indulge me another story about the transformative power of music I will share The Cop and The Anthem, a short story by O. Henry, the nom de plume of William Sidney Porter an American essayist with a penchant for irony. The cop and the anthem is about a homeless man named Soapy who sleeps on a park bench in New York City when the weather is agreeable and hopes to get arrested and sent to Blackwell Island, a New York prison, for the winter. When he wakes to a covering of frost one morning he makes the decision to do something to capture the attention of a police officer and a magistrate's prison sentence.

The first thing he attempts is to enter a restaurant where he will order a fine meal with insufficient funds to pay. This plan is thwarted post haste when the head waiter noticed his less than seemly appearance and escorts him out. His second idea was to throw a stone into a shop window. When the curious and a police officer arrives Soapy remains on the scene. The officer asks who had done such a thing and Soapy responds, "Don't you think that I had something to do

with it?” But the officer finds it hard to believe that a vandal would remain on the scene; assuming that the perpetrator would flee. A second time the police let Soapy off. He entered a second restaurant, and his shabby pants escaped the notice of the staff. He feasted on beef steak, pancakes, donuts and pie and then confessed to having no money to pay for his meal. “Call a cop.” Said Soapy contentedly. “No cop for you” said the waiter while he and a second server heaved Soapy out the door and onto the street. A cop, two stores down in front of a drug store, watched as Soapy lifted himself up from the pavement. The officer laughed, turned and made his way down the street.

A few blocks over Soapy saw a woman of modest dress and a policeman standing not too far off. He went up to her and asked if she would like to come and play in his yard. He assumed that the woman would enlist the help of the officer to be rid of a pesky gentleman. But the woman stood and looked into the window. Soapy turned to walk away when the woman caught his sleeve and said that she would be happy to join him. She confided that she was hesitant at first to acknowledge the invitation because the police officer was watching. Soapy now realized the occupation of the woman and ditched at the next corner. Following this he started ranting in drunken gibberish at the top of his lungs. But the police officer assumed him to be a student from Yale indulging in some end of term revelry and decided to leave him to his celebrating. Soapy was beginning to believe that he could not get arrested and would need to spend the winter in the cold.

He began making his way back to his park bench. But on an unusually quiet corner Soapy came to a standstill. Here was an old church, quaint, and rambling and gabled. Through one violet-stained window a soft light glowed, where, no doubt, the organist loitered over the keys, making sure of

his mastery of the coming Sabbath anthem. For there drifted out to Soapy's ears sweet music that caught and held him transfixed against the convolutions of the iron fence.

The moon was above, lustrous and serene; vehicles and pedestrians were few; sparrows twittered sleepily in the eaves--for a little while the scene might have been a country churchyard. And the anthem that the organist played cemented Soapy to the iron fence, for he had known it well in the days when his life contained such things as mothers and roses and ambitions and friends and immaculate thoughts and collars.

The conjunction of Soapy's receptive state of mind and the influences about the old church wrought a sudden and wonderful change in his soul. He viewed with swift horror the pit into which he had tumbled, the degraded days, unworthy desires, dead hopes, wrecked faculties and base motives that made up his existence.

And also in a moment his heart responded thrillingly to this novel mood. An instantaneous and strong impulse moved him to battle with his desperate fate. He would pull himself out of the mire; he would make a man of himself again; he would conquer the evil that had taken possession of him. There was time; he was comparatively young yet; he would resurrect his old eager ambitions and pursue them without faltering. Those solemn but sweet organ notes had set up a revolution in him. To-morrow he would go into the roaring downtown district and find work. A fur importer had once offered him a place as driver. He would find him to-morrow and ask for the position. He would be somebody in the world. He would--

Soapy felt a hand laid on his arm. He looked quickly around into the broad face of a policeman.

"What are you doin' here?" asked the officer.

"Nothin'," said Soapy.

"Then come along," said the policeman.

"Three months on the Island," said the Magistrate in the Police Court the next morning.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord. In laughter. In song. In prayer.

Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing. Sing a lament if your soul is heavy or a song of praise in elation but sing. Or whistle. Or hum.

Enter his gates with Thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.

Regardless of the circumstance in which you find yourself know that God joins you in the moment. Acknowledge God's presence in your laughter and in your lament; in your doubts and in your certainty; in the ending of death and in the new beginning of resurrection.

For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever and his faithfulness is for all generations.

This is good news worthy of singing about. Yesterday, today and tomorrow we can rely of the sure love of God. Take it up a notch. Make a joyful noise. Amen.