

Heart Songs

The Rt. Rev. Jeff W. Fisher
Sermon from September 17, 2021
Psalm 104: 25-34

Daughters of the King Assembly, Camp Allen, Texas

Tonight, I am filled with music, and I am filled with joy.
I am filled with joy for many reasons, one of which is this:
This is the first in-person DOK Assembly in two years!

The joy of the music of the church of Jesus Christ - has filled my entire life.
As a very young boy, I can remember sitting in a Sunday school room, gathered
around a piano.

With the other kids, I sat cross legged on the floor, on the cold linoleum.
Sitting on the floor of that room, the piano player taught us kids some of the
wonderful hymns of faith, such as "I Sing a Song of the Saints of God."

Later on in our local Episcopal parish, I joined the junior choir, led by a jolly
woman named Lois Geaslen, whom we all called "Mrs. G."
Mrs. G. had a poster displayed in the choir room that read:
"Those who sing, pray twice."

When I was in the church youth group in the 1980s, the charismatic renewal
movement in the church was in full swing.
And some other teenagers and I helped to lead the music for a new Sunday evening
Eucharist, with contemporary music.

In my life, I have led children's chapel while playing hymns on the piano.
And I have even played the pipe organ on occasion, yet my playing pales in
comparison to the gifts of Dr. Linda Patterson!

And I love the entire breadth of our music tradition:
My heart soars when a pipe organ and a trumpet lead us in triumphant hymns.
My toe taps and I raise my hands along with rhythmic guitars and drums.
From Anglican chant, to praise and worship music, to African American spirituals,
to Latino choruses -

I sing out with the words of today's Psalm:
"I will praise my God while I have my being.
I will sing to the Lord as long as I live!"

Over my entire life, the joy and vibrancy of my faith in Jesus has been expressed -
through music.

And the ancient St. Hildegard also expressed the joy and vibrancy of *her* faith in
Jesus - through music.

For today, September 17th, is the feast day of St. Hildegard of Bingen, because she
died on September 17th, in the year 1179.

Even though Hildegard lived over 800 years ago, she was a significant leader in the
Church.

Hildegard founded and led monasteries for women.

She even led four preaching missions, in and around Bingen, in present day
Germany.

Hildegard was well-known for her vivid visions and illustrations, compositions
abounding with feminine imagery for God and God's creative activity.

And maybe most of all, Hildegard believed that music - was essential to the worship
of God.

She composed a liturgical drama, titled "The Play of Virtues", in which the
personified virtues sing their parts.

And in which the personified devil - cannot sing at all.

Hildegard's liturgical compositions are described as "chant of surpassing sweet
melody."

Our own Glory Bound Singers sung tonight, before worship, a musical piece called:
"Prayer of Hildegard."

And in that Prayer of Hildegard, we hear this:

"Composer of all things, light of all the risen...

Joy in glory, our Savior, be with us and hear us."

Hildegard sings - with joy in her heart.

Now many of you know that I am a college football fan, especially a fan of the Texas Longhorns.

As a matter of fact, tomorrow night I will be attending the Texas vs. Rice football game in Austin.

Yet last Saturday, the ranked Texas Longhorns lost to the unranked and down-on-their-luck Arkansas Razorbacks.

The highly anticipated game was played in Arkansas, and the stadium there was sold-out, standing room only.

The Arkansas fans were pumped to beat Texas.

And the Arkansas players were ready to knock Texas off their pedestal.

Now when watching college football, we tend to forget that the guys on the field are just 19 and 20-year olds.

Those players are just young people, kids filled with heart and emotions - and hormones.

On paper, we can analyze the strengths of players and teams, in order to make predictions about the winner.

Yet the outcome of the game is not just about strategy and size.

And I believe that last Saturday, those Arkansas kids on the field wanted it more, in their heart.

For the outcome of the game - can be about who wants to win it the most.

The outcome of the game - is about heart.

In our faith in Jesus,

In our singing to the composer of all things,

In our praise of the light of all the risen,

We are simply expressing - what is in our heart.

In the life of Hildegard - in her heart, she sings out with joy in glory.

And as in the Psalm from tonight, in our hearts, we sing to the Lord, as long as we live.

Yet all of that music and singing is *not* a performance.

For unless our praise comes from a place of joy and love and heart,

Then we are just a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

Because all of our music and singing - is about the light of the risen Jesus.
All of our music and singing - is joy in glory.
All of our music and singing comes - because we have good news, *great news*, to share.

And my dear friends in the Daughters of the King, the great news of which we sing is this:

No matter your background or race or nationality or gender identity, Jesus saves you.

No matter what you have done in your life, Jesus forgives you.

No matter how many crosses you bear, Jesus resurrects you.

Because nothing, nothing, nothing, can ever separate you from the love of God!

Therefore, I am filled with joy, joy because I know the *great news* of Jesus.

With the Psalmist and with Hildegard, I shout out from my heart:

“I will praise my God while I have my being.

As long as I live,

I will sing to the Lord.”

AMEN.