

Rev. Sandra Brown

Meditation: "The Sacrament of Singing"

Scripture Readings: Psalm 96:1-6 and Ephesians 5:15-20

October 8, 2017 - Hymn Fest Sunday

If we look closely at our New Testament scripture lesson for today, we'll notice that it talks about foolishness and wisdom. It says, "Be careful how you live—not as unwise people, but as wise" and it goes on to spell out what this looks like. Foolishness is getting drunk with wine. Don't do that, says the writer of Ephesians. Makes sense. People do foolish things when they're drunk.

So don't get drunk with wine, that's foolish, but—what are we to do instead? What does it mean to live wisely?

"Be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts."

To live wisely is to sing. Especially to sing with other people. Now, the letter to the Ephesians was written long before the age of modern scientific studies. But modern science backs this up! Singing is powerful stuff! Did you know that choral singing has been shown to improve immunity in cancer patients? And that it reduces stress? According to Prevention magazine, studies show positive mood changes among choir singers, including feeling happier, less anxious, less depressed, and overall more plucky about what life has to offer. Singing also reduces the severity of snoring (ask choir . . .)? It can even help with asthma, because regular singing strengthens the muscles of your airways. Singing produces both endorphins and oxytocin, hormones that do all kinds of good things for your body and brain. It creates a sense of community, and builds trust. And the best part of it is . . . it does not matter how well you sing! You can a terrible singer and still gain all these benefits. Wise living, indeed.

Psalm 96, which Pat read, says, "Sing to the Lord a new song." I'm struck by that word "new." We LOVE our old songs . . . if you have satellite radio in your car, then you know that there are entire radio stations devoted to old songs. There's the 60's on 6, and the 70's on 7, and the 80's on 8. And we love our old hymns, we love Amazing Grace, and A Mighty Fortress, and Blessed Assurance. We love the tunes, we love the words, we love the memories they bring back.

But once upon a time, all of those old favorites were brand new. Once upon a time, these were new songs that church folks had to learn.

We need new songs, because no one song or collection of songs can ever tell the whole story about God, or ever fully express our relationship to God. We need new songs, because God may not change, but the world does, and so do styles of music. We need new songs, because singing embeds ideas and imagery into our brains, and if we want to grow, we need new things in there. So let us live wisely. Let us sing new songs to the Lord.