

A little-known fact that you may not know about me, is that I sign whenever I am upset.

Whether I am sad, frustrated, anxious, or even to calm myself on the rare occasions when I am angry.

I sing when words alone cannot express the feelings that are bubbling up inside me.

One of my favorite songs to sign is called, *You Gotta Sing*, and I like it because sometimes I have to sing, not because I want to, but because the Spirit is compelling me to.

It goes like this:

*You gotta sing when the spirit says sing,
you gotta sing when the spirit says sing.
When the spirit says sing, you gotta sing right along,
you gotta sing when the spirit says sing.*

One thing I love about that song is that you can change it to whatever you need to say whatever you need to hear.

You could say, “You gotta pray when the spirit says pray...” or

you could say, “You gotta dance when the spirit says dance...”

You all know I like to dance.

Or you could say, “You gotta praise when the spirit says praise...”

or, “you gotta cry when the spirit says cry...”

There are so many ways we can apply that simple song to our feelings.

Now, when I am feeling contemplative, I will sing one of my favorite songs called Sanctuary.

It reminds me that I am called by God to be a living testimony to God’s love, and it goes like this:

*Lord prepare me, to be a sanctuary,
pure and holy, tried and true.
With thanksgiving, I’ll be a living sanctuary for you.*

Now I have a confession to make.

When I am upset or frustrated by something going on at church, I sing a tried and true song, that always makes me feel better.

This song has always moved me, reminded me of my calling to serve the world on God’s behalf.

Now, we all have a calling, we have gifts that God has blessed us with that we need to use to better the world.

The question is, are we answering that call?

This song is each of us saying, YES, here we are, God, we will go where you lead.

Sometimes when I do not like where God is leading me, I sing this song to remind myself that it is not I who is in charge, but I am called to submit to the ways in which God is working in and through me.

Singing this song helps me remember why I went into the ministry, why I said, “yes” on those rare occasions when I want to say, “no.”

It’s called, *Here I am, Lord*, and it goes like this...

*I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard My people cry.
All who dwell in deepest sin,
My hand will save.*

*I who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear My light to them?
Whom shall I send?*

Now, the next part is the chorus which I sing to myself on repeat when I am frustrated, or questioning my calling.

You are welcome to join in, if you know it...

*Here I am Lord, Is it I, Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go Lord, if You lead me.
I will hold Your people in my heart.*

That song also has a special place in my heart because we sang it at Randy Nowell’s memorial service.

So music has the power to move each of us, individually, depending upon how we are feeling and what we need to hear.

I am sure you all have your favorite songs that you turn to when you need them.

But it also has the power to move us collectively.

Every protest and demonstration I have been to, maybe except for the Women's March, have all involved singing.

One popular song is called, *We Shall Not Be Moved*, and it goes like this...

*We shall not, we shall not be moved.
We shall not, we shall not be moved.
Just like a tree, that's planted by the water,
we shall not be moved.*

*All in this together,
we shall not be moved.
All in this together,
we shall not be moved.
Just like a tree, that's planted by the water,
we shall not be moved.*

Or, we could sing it for our church, let's try it with *UCC Burlington...*

Whether individual or collective, joyful or sad, motivated to change the world or frustrated by the state of the world, there's a song for every feeling under the sun.

It often communicates for us when we can't find the words we need.

It connects us and unites us across ethnicity, racial identity, language, class and culture.

It creates a palpable energy in the room when everyone is singing together, an energy and a bond that words alone cannot create.

And the shadow side of the power of music is that everyone has an opinion about it.

You all know this, because nobody is exempt.

We all have our opinions about music, especially in church.

Each Sunday, Joe and I do our best to choose a variety of songs, with the hope that everyone here will be able to connect with the divine in something that we sing.

But I am sure that sometimes we fall down on the job, because picking 3 songs to sing that speak to 80+ people with a variety of tastes, is no easy feat.

Some like contemporary, some like traditional, some like updated lyrics, some like original lyrics.

Some people want us to change the Offertory Response regularly, some want to sing the Doxology all the time and get tired of us changing it.

The power of music is evident every time I plan a wedding or a funeral.

A family might think they don't know what kind of music they want, but when I start listing potential songs, they quickly say yes to the ones they like and no to the ones they don't like.

Some of us have personal connections to songs that we grew up with or maybe associate with an important person or event.

Sometimes we can explain the sentimental meaning behind why we like a song, but other times, it's preference.

You like or dislike a song, and might not be able to explain it.

It's simply personal taste.

I read an article on the website Patheos the other day which was titled, "10 Hymns That We Should Stop Singing."

Well, when I saw that headline, I was like a fish to bait and I had to read it.

As it turns out, I disagreed with a lot of the author's opinions, and I wasn't surprised.

The minute you share your opinion on music, you're inviting others to disagree with you, that's just how it works.

I think the writer of the Psalm that we heard this morning knew this as well.

As I bet the people in the Ancient Near East thousands of years ago had their opinions on music just like we do.

The reason why I have this hunch is because this scripture mentioned nearly every musical instrument that was known to them at the time!

The Psalmist wrote about the trumpet and the lute and the harp, the tambourine, stringed instruments and the pipe.

He also wrote about clanging cymbals, loud clashing cymbals to be exact.

The poet didn't mention drums, but I am sure those were meant to be included too.

All of these things, and more, including dance and breath, are to be used to praise God.

Try to imagine all these instruments together and I bet it's a messy cacophony, but that's also the beautiful music of creation, a messy chaos of different noises.

Everything from kids crying, to birds chirping, to dogs growling, to people singing off key in their cars and tapping off beat on their steering wheels off, to the New York Philharmonic playing Bach.

These noises are the music of our reality that remind us that we are alive, and that God moving through and amongst us.

The Psalmist calls us to lift up all these noises as an expression of our praise to God.

Whether singing privately to yourself, or singing collectively at a social protest, or at church, or at a concert, all these musical expressions remind us that God is with us,

God abides with us through it all, and music is an expression of the way God's love unites us.

We have this Music Appreciation Sunday every year to recognize this.

To recognize the power that music has to connect us to each other and to God, and to celebrate the importance of music in right here, in our community.

But it doesn't come without labor, and I think we owe a big thank you all those who work tirelessly to provide it for us.

So let us give a round of applause to the choir, who meet faithfully every week to prepare beautiful music, and to Joe who leads them and provides us with beautiful organ and piano music every week.

Thank you, to all of you. Amen.