

*“Heart Song”*

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Text: Psalm 96, Colossians 3:15-16

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In our children’s time today, Fred asked the children about their “heart songs”. A heart song is simply defined as the song or songs that have stuck with us and have become important to us over time.

I immediately think of my mother’s shrill, strong voice soaring above our sleepy heads, singing “How great though art” – against the quiet night...and One of my Father’s favourites: “Trust and Obey” – Or maybe he was just trying to tell the five of us something at bedtime (ie. “Get to Bed!”)...But his singing, as singing has the power to do – usually calmed us right down.

For many of us, music has a way of weaving deeply into the fabric of our lives, with all the emotion and memory that it carries. What a blessing it is to be sung over as a child - before bed, or by a Sunday school teacher, or camp counselor. And what an honour it is - in this life - to sing over someone else... In many ways, a song can be the most intimate forms of prayer.

Is there a childhood hymn or song that has stayed with **you** over the years? What songs rise first from your soul, when you are singing to others?

As I thought more about the songs placed within our hearts and the songs that speak to our souls, I was reminded of a children’s book entitled, “On the Night You were Born”. The pictures in this book reveal scenes of nature; dancing and making music around each child from their birth. The idea is that the universe sings a new, unique, song to each child who is born. There are two Polar bears dancing against the starry night sky, on the cover...The author, Nancy Tillman, uses Psalm 139 as her reference: “For you are fearfully and wonderfully made” – She ends her book this way:

“For never before, in story or rhyme,

(not even once upon a time),

Has the world ever known you, my Friend

And it never will, not ever again...

Heaven blew every trumpet

And played every horn

On the wonderful, marvelous

Night you were born.”

Now the skeptic in me wants to deconstruct a little, not every baby is born at night, obviously – AND, is this really a helpful message - for an already somewhat narcissistic, me-centric culture...?

But - it is also true – as Tillman writes, “**You are the one and only ever you**”. This book’s beauty, I think, is that the author uses “common events such as *geese flying, ladybugs landing, and the moon up at morning - to celebrate the birth of a child*. She says, “It is my hope that **even as children grow into adults, whenever they see these common events in nature – they will be reminded of how valuable they are**”.

It is intriguing to me - how we can be at the center of the universe, at the same time, such a very minuscule part of its fabric. This is the beauty and mystery of being in relationship with God. A God who comes near to us and one who is also removed from us; A God who is both connected intimately to each living soul through the natural world and who is also divine, transcendent and beyond our understanding. How does this translate to the songs/to the music that we carry in the deepest parts of our souls?

I offer three things - that I will spend a short time with this morning:

1. Our experiences with song can be both very intimate and also transcendent.
2. The Bible is alive with song.

And 3 - through our personal experiences – and as we look to scripture – we can see the importance of carrying our heart songs.

**So first, our experiences with songs/with singing/ with music can be both very intimate** –something we can all relate to - **and also transcendent** – pointing us to something far greater than ourselves.

Here are some moments from my own experience with song:

I have been able to witness Retirement Home and Nursing Home hymn sings – and the power that music holds to move a person beyond the reality of their circumstances. I have had the privilege to sing – at the bedside of someone dying – hoping that a familiar song would bring comfort. I have experienced singing as a way back to prayer – at times when using words for prayers - became difficult for me as a young adult. I have sung with my sisters when there were simply no words, because we were leaving one sister behind in the mental health wing of a hospital. I have once been knee slapping to a song in my car and caught the grin of a fellow driver watching me – and had a great belly laugh at my own expense. I have heard four-part, rich *Acapella* song fill the barn at

an old order wedding - and have greatly enjoyed spontaneous family dance parties when I – and my family need to let off a little steam on a Sunday afternoon. These are some of the intimate and transcendent moments of song in my life. What moments come to mind for you?

**The Bible is alive with Song.** The Bible is not a song book. Yet it vibrates, moves, swings, dips and leaps in song...

You can discover songs in Scripture - for all sorts of reasons: praise, fear, confession, teaching, passing on story, deliverance, celebration, and loss, to name a few.

Moses and Miriam sing a song of praise after crossing the red sea; there are 150 Psalms written by a lot more people than David; there is the Song of Songs (from the wise King **who wrote** over 1000 songs, but deemed this song - between Bride and Groom - his best work); Psalm 119 – is the longest song – an anthem, really - about the word of God and how important it is, - and the shortest hymns, both found in Chronicles are each 7 words long; There are laments from great Prophets (Isaiah, Ezekial, Amos, Habakkuk, Jeremiah) over the people and their circumstances, there are funeral chants and dirges, the book of Lamentations is comprised of 5 songs, all mourning the fall of Jerusalem; In Job the stars and angels sing; **And there are also** Songs of praise; Songs from Deborah, Hannah's prayer, Mary's song; Paul and Silas sing a hymn while in prison – before being freed by God; And Jesus and his Apostles sing a hymn together, following the last supper, in the upper room. Song is an integral part of these ancient writings and of the lives of the people whom these accounts were written about. The importance of carrying songs with us as people of faith continues today.

As we look at the narrative of songs, woven through scripture maybe it is good to also ask: What is God's heart song for us? What is God's dreaming for her people today?

**Finally, through our personal experiences - and as we look to scripture, we can see the importance of carrying a song in our hearts;**

I carry treasured songs with me from my childhood and songs that affected me in my youth, songs that challenged and inspired me in my young adult hood. This list goes on as do our experiences. These are the songs that call to the deeper parts of our souls, that remind us of who we are and of who we are becoming. These songs bind us to people, to community, to convictions and call out our best selves to journey with God.

One Wednesday morning – on the day that Helen Reusser passed away, I noticed a bird singing at the top branches of the tree where I park my car, here at church. It was just a common house finch, brown with a few red patches – but it was singing so cheerily into the air...I couldn't help but see the connection – sing a new song. That little bird signified to me - a new beginning for Helen – a freedom – a release - and also

another great loss for the rest of us. Maybe nature not only surrounds us in song at our births as the children's book suggests - but also sings out of its deep experience, a new song, a heart song - in our time of death and transition. Maybe this is also a song for this community, as we remember our Dear Ones who have walked with us, allowing their heart songs to combine with our own on this journey forward.

May our heart songs continue to inform us - and to be informed - by our relationship with our Creator and with each other. Amen