

Reflections for Singing Sunday - April 19, 2020

I remember Bill Kruger as we celebrate congregational singing. He was a passionate and gifted advocate and participant in the congregational song. Blessed be his memory!

When I was asked if I would be interested in participating in Singing Sunday, I didn't hesitate. Of course I would be interested! It would give me an opportunity to reflect once again on the many hymns that have nurtured, inspired, challenged, and comforted me over the past years. The major challenge would be to narrow the list down. But even that challenge is a joy, as I reflect on text, theology, and hear the music in my mind's ear. And if you have difficulty hearing music in your mind's ear as you read the hymns, text and music, you can a) sing the hymn! and/or b) look for the hymn on youtube.

So what should it be? Nostalgic, with emotional connections and memories? Oh, there are lots of those: **O have you not heard of that beautiful stream; O that I had a thousand voices; Holy God, we praise thy name; For God so loved us.** Note that these are all German background (although "Holy God" is based on the *Te Deum laudamus* from the 4th century). And that's only a very few of many that would qualify in that category.

Now that Easter's over, maybe it should be a rollicking barnburner. Okay, that may be stretching the definition of rollicking and/or barnburner - this is a Mennonite hymnal/supplement that we're talking about! **Wonderful grace of Jesus** - go basses! **All hail the power of Jesus' name** - tenors in the second last measure - woo-hoo! **I will stand in the congregation** and I will exalt you - and I might move around just a little bit while I do so. Or, with a proper samba percussion section, we could go Latino with that wonderful hymn by the Swedish hymn writer Per Harling - that's right, Swedish - "**You are holy, you are whole**" - #34 in Sing the Story. Now that's one that even I would move to - subtly, smoothly. Yep, just like the Psalms exhort us faithful to do! By the way, that hymn is wonderful - text, music, fun to sing, and even to move to. And we needn't feel badly about enjoying ourselves when we sing!

But as Bob Dylan so famously sang, the times, they are a-changin'. For me, Easter had a different feel this year. Other years, we observe Lent, Palm Sunday, holy week, Good Friday (a quick aside - why is it called "Good?" Check out one possible answer in Carl Daw's incredible hymn text "**How shallow former shadows seem beside this great reverse**" - HWB # 251). But we all know what's coming. We know how it's going to end up. And that's not a bad thing. This year, though, things seem a little less certain in our world, and for me, that has given a different feeling about Easter. Jesus' words on the cross from Psalm 22 - **My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?** (HWB #246 & 248) - suggest that Jesus may have felt less than certain about what he was facing. So, **Jesus walked this lonesome valley** - Sing the Story # 80. **I want Jesus to walk with me**

- HWB # 439. **Precious Lord, take my hand** - HWB # 575.

We pray. **O Lord hear my prayer.** When I call, answer me. Come and listen to me. (HWB #348). **Let nothing trouble you.** Let nothing frighten you. Whoever has God lacks nothing (HWB #562). **Through our fragmentary prayers** and our silent, heart-hid sighs, wordlessly the Spirit bears our profoundest needs and cries (HWB #347).

We ask for healing and wholeness. **O Christ, the healer,** we have come to pray for health, to plead for friends (HWB #379). **Healer of our every ill,** light of each tomorrow, give us peace beyond our fear, and hope beyond our sorrow (HWB #377). **In your sickness,** your sufferings, your trials and pains, He is with you all the time (HWB #585).

We reflect on scripture. **I to the hills will lift mine eyes.** From whence doth come mine aid? My safety cometh from the Lord, who heaven and earth hath made (HWB #563). **Shepherd me, O God,** beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life (HWB #519).

We acknowledge that we miss gathering as a church. **What is this place** where we are (**not!**) meeting? . . . It becomes a body that lives when we are (**not**) gathered (HWB #1, altered). **Blest be the tie that binds** our hearts in Christian love. We share each other's woes, each other's burdens bear. When we asunder part, it gives us inward pain, but we shall still be joined in heart, and hope to meet again! (HWB #421).

We give thanks. **In thee is gladness** amid all sadness, Jesus, sunshine of my heart (HWB #114). **My life flows on in endless song,** above earth's lamentation. No storm can shake my inmost calm while to that Rock I'm clinging. Since Love is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing? (HWB #580). **Now thank we all our God** with heart and hands and voices. Oh, may this bounteous God . . . free us from all ills (HWB #86 - written by Martin Rinckart, a pastor in Eilenburg, Germany during the Thirty Years war. In 1637, 8000 people in Eilenburg died of the plague, and Rinckart officiated at 4000 funerals. Now thank we all our God?).

We acknowledge the sovereignty of God. **You are all we have.** You give us all we need. Our lives are in your hands. (Sing the Journey #29). **Come, Holy Spirit,** from heaven shine forth with your glorious light. Disperse the shadows over us, renew and strengthen your people. You are our only comforter, peace of the soul . . . in trouble, you are our strength. (HWB #298). **The Lord is my light** and my salvation; whom shall I fear? (Sing the Journey #97). **All will be well** . . . and so we pray to trust in the hope that all manner of things shall be well. (StJ #98).

And we sing! My choice(s)? Obviously I couldn't decide! Beyond the above-mentioned 30 hymns I chose 2 hymns, both from Sing the Story, but the first one needs to be sung a

cappella with only a simple drum beat. **Come, bring your burdens to God**, for Jesus will never say no (Sing the Story # 50). And then - perhaps particularly during this time, we have more time for silence and reflection. We have fears - for ourselves, for our families, our communities, our world. We may feel alone. But we are chosen; we are named; and we are deeply loved.

"I will come to you in the silence, I will lift you from all your fear. You will hear my voice, I claim you as my choice, be still and know I am here. I am hope for all who are hopeless. I am eyes for all who long to see. In the shadows of the night I will be your light, come and rest in me!

Do not be afraid, I am with you. I have called you each by name. Come and follow me, I will bring you home; I love you, and you are mine!"

Thanks be to God!

Sing the Story # 49 - **I will come to you in the silence.**

Amen.