

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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The Reverend David J. Powers  
Sunday, September 26, 2021

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### **2 Chronicles 5:11-14**

Now when the priests came out of the holy place (for all the priests who were present had sanctified themselves, without regard to their divisions, and all the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, their sons and kindred, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps, and lyres, stood east of the altar with one hundred twenty priests who were trumpeters). It was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the LORD, and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the LORD, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever," the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.

Friends, the grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever. Amen.

Music is the universal language of humankind. Longfellow's word so many years ago, perhaps they resonate with you this day. If you are a music lover, you know that music at one moment can transport us. It can move us forward in time or backwards in time. It can change the shape of our heart in a given moment, that is to say, that there are certain moments, certain emotions that can only be accurately articulated by music. So, when Whitney Houston's "I Want to Dance with Somebody" comes on the radio, if you're not moving your body or jumping around, then someone needs to take your pulse. Or when Sam Cook's "A Change Is Going To Come" comes on, and if you are not transported back to remembering the struggle of civil rights movement in the 60s, and also being reminded of the work that we have to do right now, then someone needs to take your vitals. Or even if you're not really a country music fan, but you hear that song penned by Alan Jackson in 2001 "Where Were You When The World Stopped Turning" if it doesn't bring some emotion welled up from deep within you, then I wonder. Or, just in 2018, a part of my 2019 playlist, when you hear Childish Gambino's "This Is America" as a commentary on the violence of our country, exposing to light that which is broken within us, if you are not moved then you are not paying attention. There are certain moments, certain emotions, that can only be accurately articulated by music. So that when an angel tells Mary that the very spirit of God will come upon her, and that she will bear the son of God, the only response that she can muster is a song. "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Music captures our celebration, and our protest, our grief, and our memory, our disdain, and our love. It has the power to captivate and inspire unlike anything else conceived by the divine, and if you have ever attended a live concert or basked in the sounds of a choir, then you know what I am talking about. There's a way in which the notes of a hymn can change our hearts, a way in which the notes written so long ago by Bach can center us in our practice. My first vocal performance was in third grade at a variety show last week. You got a very small hint of my musical talents that have declined over time. I performed in spray painted reebok sneakers, and I sang Elvis's song "Blue Suede Shoes" having no idea what suede was.

Sometime later I remember asking my dad what's your favorite song because I had many. He took a second to think and then he said "Hey Jude" by the Beatles. I asked him first who the

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Beatles were. I was young at that time, he explained. And then I said, "why is it your favorite song?" He said "When I hear it, I am transformed and transfigured to a new place. All I can see is me and your mom driving down the magnificent mile in Chicago, with the windows down on our 71 Chevy Vega listening to "Hey Jude" as loud as we can, and, as he's telling me this story I'm watching as his head kind of leans back, he's actually going to a different place even as he tells it.

Pablo Casales reminds us, "music is the divine way to tell beautiful and poetic things to the heart." So, this scene, from Second Chronicles, of the Ark of the Covenant being drawn into the temple

As God makes God's way, as the people believed into that place something happens, there are 120 trumpeters on the east side, so donut side of the temple, right? It is their job along with the choir to play and to sing, to raise songs of praise to God, to glorify God with their voices and with their plane, to lift music that will transform the gathered masses, and what happens this cloud, this energy moves into that place.

It changes what is happening in that place. The music that they lift glorifies God, indeed, but it also makes even the preacher go silent.

Music perhaps, unlike any of the other forever pieces that we will study, can change our hearts in profound ways that even the spoken word will fall short of.

The power of music in this scene in Second Chronicles renders any other form of communication useless.

"Of the choir and the congregation's power and singing," the poet Tori Blue articulates, "this way there is music in your voice," she says, "to the choir songs, like gospel, lifting us from our graves into a world with no space for hiding. We truly belong here thanks to you rise and shine. The choir sings rise and shine you say, and as our rising and shining" Friends, gather around us, we have courage in our climbing. You remind us that we are free and so we stand together in the light. Music, it turns out, must be a forever piece for us in this place, because, in music, we are drawn from our graves and freed by the promises of God. In music, we experience that which cannot be experienced in any other way. By music our hearts are shaped by the divine, so that when we lift our songs with 'Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty' not only is God glorified, but the magnificence of God is proclaimed. When the choir sings "Softly and Tenderly" to us of Jesus calling, we are reminded that the voice of God still calls us this day. When Wiley and Bailey sing of "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms of God" we actually trust that we can do that.

On Friday about 11 o'clock, Bill and Sissy Long made their way here through the alleyway. They got in their wheelchairs, and they rolled themselves here into the sanctuary. Bill and Sissy are moving today to Atlanta to be closer to their family. Some eight decades they spent here. In this choir loft, they came in their wheelchairs, and we took a lap. We took a lap

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and we paused. We paused right there at their pew, and then we rolled over here, and they were positioned right here in the center aisle, and Nancy and Betty Lewis from our choir were standing right here and we had a ritual parting with them.

We spoke liturgy together and we prayed together, but we also sang “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”, and it is my belief that, in that moment, they knew. They will know as they go to Atlanta that, indeed the God, that they worship that's drawn them to this place, is mighty indeed. A bulwark never failing for them, and for the church that they leave with so much love we sang “Now Thank We All Our God” and as we raise our voices few as they were, it is my belief, that the ears of god tingled, grateful for songs to rise from this place of praise and of thanksgiving. Bill and Sissy in that moment knew, not just through spoken word, but even more so, in song ,t that the God that they worship and the God that they know, is a mighty God. And that the God that they worship and the God that we together know is worthy of our thanks. So, this day we remind ourselves that there is that which must be communicated by the divine, that cannot be communicated in any other way, but through voices lifted and songs proclaimed.

So let us this day raise our voices in this place and let us do it forever. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God, Mother of us all. Amen.