

**Songs of Praise and Commitment**  
**Genesis 1:1-2:3**  
**First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**  
**July 12, 2020**  
**Rev. Jill Cameron Michel**

If you read the newsletter this week, you already know that for the remainder of the summer we will be exploring the power that music has to help us worship.

For each week we have chosen one of the songs that we as a congregation sing with greater frequency and we are pairing it with a scripture - sometimes it will be the scripture from which the song is drawn, sometimes a scripture with a similar theme - but together we will look at the messages in the songs we love to sing.

So, why do this?

Partially, it is because music has power. In fact, a friend of mine recently asked the question on Facebook, "Why do we sing?" And many people responded. Answers varied from singing to express ourselves, to evoke emotion, or to prompt action, to singing as a way of bonding with others or connecting with God, as a way of learning things that we might have trouble remembering until we set them to a tune, as a way to feel joy. Someone answered by pointing out the quote from St. Augustine which simply says, "To sing is to pray twice." And someone humorously said, "I sing because I can't dance."

There are many reasons we sing, and there is something about singing - even for those of us who don't always hit the right notes - something that resonates deep within us.

But in addition to the expression and emotion and connection that music draws from us, we are going to be exploring the songs that we sing frequently because words matter. And what we sing in worship not only evokes emotion, but also claims something about God. So, we are asking questions over the coming weeks about the God we sing.

Finally, as we continue to worship at a safe distance from one another, and as we continue to hope and anticipate the time when we are back together in shared space, we also know that singing will inevitably be impacted in our worship together. It is likely that when we are first back together in common space we will worship without congregational singing. So, in anticipation of that reality, we want to take advantage of this time when we are still physically distanced and sing our hearts out, sing some of our favorite songs, lift our voices together - even distantly - to God.

So, this first week of exploring the God we sing, we are looking at the song we shared as our opening hymn: Morning Has Broken. This song borrows images from the creation story, naming the first morning - a reminder of God's power to create. Throughout the verses of the song we sing of blackbirds and dewfall, of gardens and sunlight, of the presence of God and of the chance we are given because every morning is a new first morning.

And, isn't it fitting that we should sing of the creation? After all, did you hear the rhythm and repetition and refrain that is written into the scripture itself. Throughout each day of creation the song of scripture repeats...God says...and it becomes...and God calls it good. Until finally, having called everything that was created very good, God rests.

And so, as people across time and space have done before us, we sing songs that celebrate God's good creation...the creation that surrounds us, the creation that is us, the creation that we are invited to care for.

Of course, if we let it be, singing a song like Morning Has Broken can be easy, it can be celebratory, and perhaps nothing more. For many of us who have sung this song our whole lives, it can be done in our sleep. And yet one of the challenges for us is to not only sing this as praise, but to also sing it as our commitment.

Because both the song and the story of creation remind us that what is really important are the things that are readily available, gifted to us from God. After all, when we read the creation story we are reminded that even though we can get caught up in all the things we want, creation provides us with everything we really need - in creation we have the tools for life to be self-sustaining.

And perhaps this quarantine time has reminded us of the gifts of creation. After all, since mid-March when our routines changed and many of us have been more hunkered down than we are used to, it is the outdoors, creation in all its glory that has been our safe space. Whether this time of slowing down and doing less has simply caused us to pay greater attention to the birds on the fence or the colors of the sunset, or whether the distancing we have been practicing has resulted in our spending less time in our cars and more time on bike rides and walks, most of us have been more in tune with creation than we usually are. Add to that the reality that doctor after doctor says that if we are going to socialize, we are better to do that outdoors than indoors right now, and not only is creation beautiful but it is good for our health.

And so we are reminded - yes, this is a song of praise. But it is not just a song of praise. Remember, in the creation stories human beings are given an important role. We are given the role of being caretakers of the rest of creation. Even as

we sing the words, "Praise with elation, praise every morning, God's re-creation of the new day!" we are reminded that we are invited in so many ways to be co-creators with God. And so, each new day is a chance for us to renew our commitment and to help all of creation live more fully into the vision that Genesis celebrates.

And friends, it is a vision we need. After all, we have used creation to fulfill our own desires. We have taken the riches of the land and claimed them for ourselves. We have destroyed animals' habitats and demolished earth's formations, polluted the waters and the skies, and often we have done this in the name of progress. We have lived as consumers of creation rather than cohabitating within it.

And so, we sing this and other songs like it because we celebrate God's creating power. We sing because we believe in the value and beauty of the world around us. We sing because we are optimistic and embrace the idea that today is a new start, another possibility, a chance for renewal. And we sing because we need to be reminded of the responsibility we hold, not just to notice the glories and graces of creation, but the responsibility we hold to take care of creation, to live harmoniously with the world around us, to be those who renew the world each day by who we are and how we live.

May it be so.