

Community Church of Issaquah

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Why Singing Matters

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Let me take a few steps outside the ordinary sermon format and begin today's message with a little story by Wes Fessler. It's called "Molly Monkey Saves the Music." So kick off your shoes, make yourself comfy, and lend an ear.

Molly's brother Sammy liked to play guitar and sing. The music made him happy. It was Sammy's favorite thing. He wrote a lot of songs and played them for his family too. There was not anything that Sammy wanted more to do. But one day Sammy climbed a tree and got a bit too high. A branch that he was hanging from broke off into the sky. So Sammy fell down helplessly and landed on a stone. He tried to move his arm, but he could tell he broke a bone.

The doctor at the hospital told him the brake was bad. His arm would never work again. It made him very sad. He thought about the music and the songs he loved to play. Somehow the world had changed, and nothing seemed to go his way. His sister Molly felt sad too. She knew how down he was. She wished that she could help him. That is what a sister does. She told him to be positive, and she would help him out, 'cause caring for each other is what family's all about. So, Sammy smiled a bit, because his sister seemed to care. She gave him her support and he was glad that she was there.

When Sammy got his cast off, he could not wait anymore. He picked up his guitar and quickly headed out the door. He sat beneath a tree and tried to play a little song. but Sammy's arm did not work right, and it all sounded wrong. He became so frustrated; he threw his guitar away. He thought, "Why should I keep it, if I cannot even play!" Then Molly looked outside and saw what he was going through. She had a great idea. She knew exactly what to do. She ran outside to Sammy and said, "You threw that away? Well I guess it is mine now, so I better learn how to play." She took Sammy's guitar out of the dirty old trash can and said, "Can you teach me to play?" And Sammy said, "I can."

So, Sammy showed Molly all that he knew about guitar,
and before long she learned to play just like a superstar.

Sammy was very happy. She could play and he could sing;
and now he had a buddy who could share his favorite thing.

He wrote a lot of new songs for their little family band. And Molly saved the music, since she cared to understand.

She helped Sammy to smile again, and that made her feel glad.

She felt compassion for him through the hardest times he had.

Compassion is a miracle when things seem to go wrong.

Sometimes its pleasant melody restores life's pleasant song.

The End

The first time I saw that little story, I was reminded of my own experiences in the world of music. I joined the band in junior high school thinking I would become a famous musician. But because I was already 6 feet tall by the time I reached 7th grade, the band director nudged me into playing a tuba. Seemed I might be the only one who could carry such a heavy load. I escaped that load by becoming the drum major. That was my victory over the band director. My drum major life lasted through my college days and provided scholarships so that I never had to pay a penny for any college days.

About the same time as my tuba trials, I became a Baptist and could not wait to join the youth choir at the church. I was never sure whether I would be a tenor or a bass, but since I only knew notes in the bass clef as a tuba player, that was decided for me. I didn't last long as a vocalist before the music director asked me if I would help the pianist turn pages. I thought it was an honor until one of my friends told me I had been moved because I never sang on key and the other boys were annoyed at my noise. To this day, I never sing loud enough to be heard so that I can follow that reality. You will notice that I move far away from the microphone when we sing in order to spare your ears from damage.

These silly stories raise the question, “Why does singing matter for us at church?” Let me ask you that question now. Why do you think singing or music matters in our church? Anyone want to share?

There are several reasons I believe that music and singing are an important part of our worship experience, and I’d like to share with you my own thoughts.

First, we must realize that there are certain elements or parts of every worship service, and each one is designed to add to our desire to honor the Lord Our God. I’m sure that there are some ministers who think that their sermon is the center of worship, but don’t tell on me when I say that’s not true. Each part of every worship service is equally important – sharing the scriptures, prayers, sermons and music. Woven together, we seek to make every service a true gift to God. As our scripture passages today illustrate, David spent much of his worship time in songs. And as a musician himself, he sought to enhance the words he had written with music to blend it into songs of praise. In truth, not every psalm attributed to David focuses only on happiness. Many are filled with great concern and desperate requests for God to act as David sought. Music and singing was important then, and it is important now.

The second thing I try to remind myself of is simply that each hymn we sing or is played on any instrument has a story. The writer of each song had at some point in life sat down and put into words what life what like for them. Even famous composers of the past and present told a

story of some life event. Most recently I have been enraptured by the music of a woman who is alive and active today. Her name is Bernadette Farrell, and you have heard some of her work here. If you remember when we sang “Christ Be Our Light” then you will remember her. She is a devout Catholic and British, but her lyrics and music flow across all who believe in Christ. If you think we would have to go back to the past to find a hymn with a message and personal story, think about the hymn “It is well with my soul.” Do you recall the story of Horatio Spafford who wrote the words to this hymn as he returned home from Europe and crossed the approximate place on the Atlantic Ocean where the ship bearing his wife and daughters sank, and they died. Regardless if it is sung or played, all music has a story, and many of those stories still speak to us today.

A third thought to consider about music in our churches concerns each of us and our desire to offer up words of praise and thanksgiving. Often times we might not be the person offering a prayer on behalf of the congregation, yet when we lift our voices in song that becomes a vocalized prayer offering our thanks to God. As I said earlier, I am noted as a very poor singer, and I offer no apologies for that. I am sure the Lord put some gifts or talents in other areas of my life. But I am constantly moved and blessed when I stand in a church and hear the hymns and songs. Let me ask you this: when Stephanie Commandest came and sang for us, were you not blessed beyond measure at her beautiful song “My God Is Real”? That is one example of how music leads us into moments of bliss.

The fourth thing I would say about the beauty of music and singing in church is this: God has granted us a beautiful opportunity to live out the gifts that he abundantly pours out on his children. Aren't you blessed when you can hear the voice of one of our church family singing or hear the piano playing, or the saxophone or accordion? We don't have to be soloists or accompanists or choir members to be at the heart of music and singing in the church. When we are called to worship, it is more than responsive readings, or prayers spoken and voiced in our hearts. The message of any Sunday or other service is only a part of our time we set aside to honor God with praise.

The last thing I would say about the importance of music and singing for us in church is that there is healing power in the music and the words. In my previous church, one woman often brought her mother to church with her. Vivian was in the process of having dementia issues that grew rapidly and was moved to a memory loss facility. It wasn't long before she couldn't even remember her own daughter. I remember one day Vivian's daughter and two other friends joined me in a visit. Vivian didn't remember any of us, but we decided to sing a hymn that was our singing benediction. Vivian's eyes opened widely, a smile came to her face, and she began to sing with us. "Blessed be the tie that binds." She remembered every word. Music heals. When we are feeling sad, in a dark place, or lonely, we can often find solace in the singing and music we experience in a church service.

I encourage you on the Sundays to pay attention to the words of each hymn, honor the ones who

offer leadership to our singing, celebrate the music being played as we sing. And lastly, let us all offer up our love and praise to the loving God who inspires and blesses us with singing and music. And we all can say, Thank you, Lord for this gift.