

10/17/10 –20th Sunday after Trinity (Historic) – Ephesians 5:19-20

When my wife and I were first married I was still in the army. The WELS church closest to where I was stationed was a mission congregation near Nashville, Tennessee. We found some things a bit different in our first shared church home compared to the older congregations of our childhood. For example, a number of members, like us, drove quite a distance to attend worship services. So once a month we had a potluck dinner. Before lunch could be served, some of us would set everything up. While we were doing that, others had choir practice. After the meal, the ladies would have their “Helping Hannahs” meeting. This group was like a combination our Ladies Aid and Altar Guild. At the same time the men of Council would meet. Almost every man had a position on the Council. To avoid the need for Voters’ meetings, the few of us who remained were asked to join the Council as they met. So once a month, going to church meant leaving home about 9:00 AM, driving 50 minutes for about 40 miles to get to church, and returning home at about 4:00 PM – a 7 hour church day.

Another thing that was a little different was the music. We used the The Lutheran Hymnal like our other churches. We even had an organ but it was old. The speakers rattled and vibrated. So an old piano was often used in its place. As I recall our choir had about 8 people in it. There was no Teen Choir or grade school classes singing, but we did have one member who sang as a soloist. But for those times – we’re talking back around 1977 & ’78 – her style was a bit unique. She would set the music from one of the songs in our hymnal to guitar chords and sing it in a good old down home country-western fashion, complete with nasal twang. It was a lot different from anything I had ever heard in any of our other churches I had ever attended. But although the style was different from what most of our WELS churches were doing at the time, the people in that Tennessee congregation were nevertheless just like all the rest of their fellow Christians in the WELS and elsewhere, in that they loved to sing and make music. And that’s something Paul talks about in our text to all Christians of every generation from all over the world. No matter what our cultural background might be, Christians have traditionally enjoyed music and singing. And the apostle urges us to:

“SING AND MAKE MUSIC!”

1. To the Lord God our Father, and, 2. To one another.

1. Sing and make music to the Lord God our Father.

Music has always been part of our heritage as confessional, evangelical, Lutheran Christians. When the Lutheran Reformation began, joint worship normally did not include singing by the laity. But in keeping with the Bible's teaching of the spiritual priesthood of all believers, Luther and others saw a need for hymn texts and tunes that all the members of the congregations could join in singing. While it is difficult to say with final authority just how many hymns texts Lutheran actually wrote and how many tunes he composed, the Lutheran chorale is considered one of his gifts to the church at large. By 1524 Lutheran Songbooks began to appear. One of them had 18 hymns which many credited to Luther. The Reformer also translated the liturgies of the church from their original Latin into the German language of his countrymen whom he served. It is also reported the Luther played the lute – a pear shaped string instrument.

Without a doubt, music is very much a part of our Lutheran heritage, whether we sing it, or play it, or simply enjoy listening to it. But more importantly, it is a part of our Christian heritage. And as Christians, who happen to be Lutheran, we do love to **sing and make music to the Lord God our Father**. We can trace our love for music which glorifies God way back to the early days of Christianity. It was around 62 AD when St. Paul wrote: “Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (19b-20) To be sure, our songs honor our Lord and Savior as we give him thanks and praise for all the blessings he pours out upon us. Like King David, who authored many of the songs of praise in the hymnal of the ancient Jews, the Book of Psalms, we also can sing: “Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.”(Psalm 103-1-5) And like the ancient Jews we today also use all sorts of musical instrument to glorify our God. Like them, let us, “Praise the LORD God in his sanctuary with the sounding of the trumpet with the harp and lyre with tambourine. . . . strings and flute with the clash of cymbals.”(Cf. Psalm 150)

And praising God with music and song means doing it, as Paul says here in our text, “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” To worship – in fact to do anything in the name of Jesus means to recognize him and trust in him as our God and Savior from sin through whom we have the gift of eternal life in heaven. Jesus, and only Jesus, is the One who saves us from the punishment of hell. And he alone is the One through whom we have the confident hope of being untied for all eternity with our heavenly Father. Jesus made this clear when he declared: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”(John 14:6) Whether it be in prayer or song, whether in private devotion or public worship, our overtures and praises to God reach him only because we approach his throne of grace in the name of Jesus. We approach God as ones who have been born again and are now alive with faith in our hearts – a faith which trusts in Jesus as our Savior from sin and relies on him for God’s gift of eternal life in heaven.

And our songs and music as Christians reflect the faith we have in our hearts. That’s why Paul reminds us to, “Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.” Songs that glorify God do not originate with voices that are joined in harmony in a choir, or a congregation, or in the single voice of a soloist. Music that praises the Lord does not begin with a powerful organ, or a delicate piano, or with trumpets, flutes or guitars. Songs and music that truly honor our heavenly Father originate in hearts that are filled with faith in Jesus and are projected through voices and instruments of praise.

But Paul also reminds us of something that we, perhaps, often forget. God also wants us to **sing and make music to one another**. He writes: Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.”(19a) Let’s think about that for a minute. When we sing the praise of God – and that’s what we are doing when we sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs – what else are we doing at the very same time? When we gather together here at church to join our voices in praise of God, or to listen to our choirs, or to our children sing, are we not also simultaneously proclaiming spiritual truths of Scripture to one another in song? And through that musical preaching of the gospel we build each other up as we honor God. To be sure God is being glorified, but we are being edified. Perhaps such thoughts were running through the mind of

the holy writer to the Hebrews when he said: “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”(Hebrews 10:24-25) So, as we gather together to praise and worship our God and Savior with music and songs, may our congregating and our worship of God also be a way by which we encourage each other in our Christian faith and life. Let’s use our Christian music as a tool by which we remind one another of the fact that we have a powerful and loving God, who guards and protects us, who comforts and consoles us, who guides and directs us, who forgives us and saves us.

My dear friends in Christ: May we always keep alive our Lutheran – our Christian – heritage of singing and making music to the Lord. From the heart let us offer him the best we can with voices and instruments – singing, playing and listening with faith-filled hearts which trust in Jesus as our Savior. And may our attitude always be that of the psalmist who wrote these words millenniums ago: “Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him. Praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy.”(Psalm 33:1-3) God grant us hearts of faith that will always **sing and make music to the Lord and to one another.** Amen.