

WB Friends Meeting
6-21-20,
Sue McCracken, pastor

“The Songs of Our Souls”

This week I'd like to talk about music and how it feeds our souls. I wonder what kind of responses I'd get if I asked you to each name the first song or album you purchased. For us rather seasoned members, it was probably a record album of some sort....mine was a 45 of Buddy Holly singing “Peggy Sue!”

Then in high school and college I got into “The Lettermen,” a trio with awesome harmony, and I still listen to some of the dozen or so 33 1/3 albums of theirs that I purchased back then. I eventually had a variety of LP albums from classical music to pop and Christian – and I still like listening to some of them once in a while. Next I progressed to 8 Track tape players, and I put one in the first car I purchased, a 1971 Chevy Camaro. This was the beginning of my Charismatic phase of religious life, so I had a LOT of Christian tapes and albums; probably Andre Crouch and the Disciples being my favorite at that time, especially their song titled “How Can I Say Thanks?”

And, of course, now there is Spotify, YouTube, Pandora, and any type of song you can just stream and download on your phone or device.

Music has definitely played a major role in religion, too, going clear back to ancient Biblical days.

Psalm 89:1

***“I will sing of the LORD's great love forever;
with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all
generations.”***

Psalm 104:33

***“I will sing to the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I
live.”***

Acts 16:25

“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.”

Colossians 3:16

“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.”

And I have noticed there are some of you who just spontaneously break into song at times....it's like there is always music in your head and in your soul, just begging to get out.

Of course, we Quakers have a rather checkered history with music in worship! It's not that music was forbidden in meeting for unprogrammed worship (which all early Friends' meetings were worshiped in the silence,) but simply that it had to come from individuals who had been moved by the Spirit during the quiet, to rise and share a song or hymn.

There was a pretty valid reason for no congregational group singing, and it had to do with absolute honesty and integrity. Early Quakers believed that if everyone sang songs together – even songs that were spiritually profound, if it didn't arise out of the true worship experience and profound belief of each singer, it was not genuinely Spirit inspired singing. Some also viewed music as frivolous, and not in line with the Quaker value of Simplicity.

As I thought about singing in open worship, I immediately thought of Roscoe and the number of times he shared a song or whistled a hymn for us in open worship – truly Spirit inspired!.

But eventually some Friends' meetings decided that it would be nice to share in congregational singing like some of the other protestant churches were doing, so in the late 1800's the Friends' denomination basically split over both music and having a paid pastor. One of the first hymns often shared in worship in these now programmed meetings was “How Can I Keep from Singing?” which was the song we sang this morning. It was first published in 1868 by Robert Lowry and even became erroneously thought to have been created by a Quaker since it was sung so often in Quaker worship services!

Eventually another issue arose....it was one thing to express thoughts with the words of a song, but what about using piano, organ, or any other instrumental accompaniment? I remember stories told at Pleasant Plain when a member decided the church should have an organ. Sounds like it was a rather contentious time before there was finally consensus to allow organ music! And then I think of **our** talented instrumentalists.... and what a loss it would be if these who have been gifted with instrumental musical abilities were forbidden to share their gifts in worship!

I'm fairly certain that if I asked if any of you knew any Quaker songs, the first to come to mind might be: "Walk in the Light." I especially like the line, "There's a Light that is shining in the Turk and Jew, And a Light that is shining friend in me, and you.

So back to the music of today. There's a lot of really inspiring music that causes us to feel the Spirit of God moving within us. How could you not hear Elaine play the harp, Mary share her beautiful voice (and now with Nina, too), or the bell choir or chancel choir sharing an anthem?

For my own listening pleasure of songs of inspiration, I've mainly chosen to listen to a lot of folk music because these songs tell stories, often with a moral involved. The inspiration for today's message actually came as I was walking early last Sunday morning, I opened my favorite Pandora Channel (Carrie Newcomer), and as I listened to a variety of songs, I knew there were some truths in these songs that I wanted to share with you today. Newcomer identifies as Quaker, writes most of her songs, and my very favorite, the song that challenges me, are the words from her creation, "If Not Now, Tell me When"

***If not now, tell me when
We may never see this moment, or place and time again,
If not now, if not now, tell me when.***

***I see sorrow, and trouble in this land,
Although there will be struggle, we'll make the change we can,
If not now, if not now, tell me when.***

***I may never see the promised land,
And yet, we'll take the journey,***

***We'll walk it, hand in hand,
If not now, if not now, tell me when.***

***We'll work until it's done,
Every daughter, every son,
And every soul that's ever longed for something better, something
brighter.
And it will take a change of heart for this to mend,
But miracles do happen, every shining now and then,
If not now, if not now, tell me when.***

This song is timeless because it seems like every year there are new challenges for us, and if we don't do something now to 'be the church' and make a difference, when will we?!

I also ran across a Quaker singer song writer by the name of Susan Stark who wrote a song titled "Live Up to the Light" with the opening phrase:

Live up to the Light, we're never alone,

Definitely sounds like a Quaker song!

Then I discovered a contemporary (aka 'Younger Quaker') singer by the name of Jon Watts. Watts is a Quaker musician, poet, and filmmaker who studied at Friends' Guilford College before creating six albums. One description of his music is that he uses it to speak about the Liberal Quaker experience and ideals. Watts most controversial song is called "Friend Speaks My Mind" so, of course, I wondered why it was controversial, and I had to listen to it! He starts rapping the message with these words:

***"I found Quakers... when I was just a kid,
and now I'm studyn' them... you know how that is.***

I've got George Fox on my right,
James Nalor's on my left,
and Margaret Fell is holding us – give her some respect.

***I don't fully understand it, I don't know if I can;
but I know enough to understand that I am a fan.***

It's that first generation, we look back to, to find out what being a friend means, through and through.

So when I heard this Christian stuff, I got uncomfortable a lot – I'm like , what does Jesus have to do with George Fox?!

And when I heard the word "Christ," it would make my jaw drop, and now I kinda understand the man – I got a soft spot.

I'm not a Christian...but I'm a Quaker. I got Christ's inner light, but he's not my savior."

(That's probably the line that got him into trouble!)

Maybe because it's basically rap set to music, maybe it's because he says, "I'm a Quaker but not a Christian," or "I'm a liberal friend, that means FGC, (the umbrella organization of mostly unprogrammed Friends meetings). and tons of other acronyms that set me free!

And I appreciated one of his final thoughts:

And yo, I'm sorry, like everybody, that Quakers had to split, But we're this Society of Friends, it's time we act like it,

I would love to have you all go to YouTube and watch the video of this rap music titled "Dance Party Erupts During Quaker Meeting for Worship," I LOVED it, and I know young people would, too!

So where are we with music in worship these days? It seems like having a praise band is something the younger (and a few of us seasoned worshipers) really enjoy; but standing in place for ten or fifteen minutes and singing the same words over and over gets a little boring after a while for me, so I'm probably not as into it as I could be.

And then there is the choice of singing the old gospel hymns, versus the more modern choruses. I have to admit there are some of the old hymns I don't choose for us to sing as a congregation because I just can't go with the theology. So if you're fond of hymns like "Mansion Over the Hilltop" or "The

Old Rugged Cross,” I apologize. I’m guessing there are some hymns that I’ve chosen these past four years that aren’t your favorites, either! But it always encouraged me when Roscoe would choose to close our time of gathering music with a **chorus**, “Gentle Shepherd.” And in addition to the old standard hymns, there are folk/pop songs that probably have a place in a worship service because of the challenges they bring and the depth of feeling through the moving of the Holy Spirit.

The old saying, ‘variety is the spice of life’ is no doubt true with worship music. It’s probably wise to be cognizant of the words we are singing if a song is to be sung with integrity, because, as I mentioned last week, we are what we think – and sing. So sing in the shower, sing in the car, sing along with whatever moves you toward anything that is pure, honorable, and lovely.

And, if the spirit moves you, sing in open worship!