

## **SONGS OF OUR LIVES part 2**

*Poems and Prayers and Promises and Things That We Believe In*

Some of you may remember the first part of this sermon back in January, when I talked about the ways that songs tell the stories of our lives. I shared some of my favorite and most important songs and then invited you to mention some of your most significant songs. I will again leave a few minutes at the end of this sermon for you to share the songs that best tell the story of your life journey. Even those who cannot sing a note, nor play an instrument most likely still know songs or song lyrics that help to tell the story of their journeys. Whether we consider ourselves spiritual, philosophical, rational, or humanistic, there are songs which have at least played in the background of our journeys. I invite us each to think about those songs today.

I had initially planned to continue the Songs of Our Lives series with less of a time gap, and there may be a few more episodes left for next year, but as is often the case, things happen, situations change, and this 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the sermon ended up next to last in this church year! Some sermons have to be preached at a certain time, whereas the Songs of Our Lives, at least for me, is a series that can be preached any time with an ever-increasing amount of content!

Had I preached part 2 sooner, I probably would not be able to tell you one story that has been part of my life since I was a child but required a series of recent FaceBook posts to really be worth telling. Most of you know that I really like to sing, and many of you know that I have played Guitar, a little piano, and some Tuba. Within the last couple of years I was 'friended' by a couple of guys from my high school band days. Both of them are still musically active though I am not sure exactly what pays their bills. Jay is a drummer who frequently posts information about opportunities he has had to play with groups. Kurt played Saxophone, or

more accurately Saxophones, many sizes and shapes. I don't know as much about how often he is playing, but he posts lots of interesting philosophical things about musicians which among other things remind me how much music is at the core of our being, at least for many of us! He also has posted things that affirm that the quality of music is not the most important thing, but rather the desire we have to make and appreciate music. His political posts are pretty good, too! Clearly some people are better at making music than others, but most people who commit to practicing can usually do pretty well. It is rare to find someone who is actually tone deaf, though many of us have relative pitch rather than perfect pitch. If we listen and practice we can make the right notes, it just takes a little more work!

Another revelation came this past weekend as I listened to my daughter and grandson, who is now regularly hearing the same music that I played or sang, carrying on the tradition of the music my mother played or sang to me. My grandson, Lucas, will be one at the end of July. He is beginning to walk, and he has great lungs though his words are not quite discernible as of yet! Fortunately he is mostly very good natured and sweet! I think he has the potential to be a great singer!

Another set of songs from my journey has been in my memory as I have watched posts from another old friend with whom I shared leadership of several United Methodist youth camps and conferences in Montana. She also posted pictures of her family and friends at the Flathead Lake United Methodist Camp, where I led or helped with several camp sessions over several years, frequently singing or playing. Flathead Lake is fed by the waters coming from Glacier National Park, so even in the heat of summer, the water rarely gets to 60 degrees. It is one of the most beautiful camps I have ever enjoyed! I also have been Facebook friends with a colleague with whom I served in Great Falls, MT, and have just friended another Montana Methodist colleague who is now in Massachusetts, who happens to be a great musician and member of the Montana Logging and Ballet Company, whose music is very similar in political tone to that of Roy Zimmerman, who has played here.

When I played guitar more frequently, it was usually to sing songs around the campfire. I never have been a great musician, but I certainly have enjoyed making music in lots of places and times throughout my life. I grew up Methodist, and Methodists sing their beliefs. From co-founder Charles Wesley, who put to music the theology he shared with his brother, John, the Methodists have been singing since the mid-1700s. I first sang during services, then in the Children's Choir, then at school, and later in the adult church choir of every church I attended or Ministered to as an adult. My journey has always had music, and I hope it always will! In Elgin, Illinois, and Great Falls, Montana I sang with some really good and big church choirs, while in all the other churches the choirs were smaller and somewhat less renowned, but no less fun. I also played with the Handbell Choirs in Riverton, Wyoming; Walden, Colorado; Great Falls and Havre Montana, and I played and even directed the Handbell Choir for a year at Jane's church in Montville, NJ.

There are, I will grant, some people who are just not musical, but there are lots of us for whom life would just not be worth living without our music! I've never been that good at remembering which artist or group played or sang which song or piece, but I like lots of music from lots of different categories, from classical strings, to brass ensembles, to full concert choirs and bands, to group and solo artists of many genders and genres. When I was in college and seminary, I often studied to classical music, though in recent years I have come to just appreciate quiet when I can get it! Often these days, I write to the melody of mowers, blowers and weed-whackers! I must admit that I am not a big fan of heavy metal music, nor most rap, nor of any music played so loud that you can feel the bass a block away, but most music is good. And most music tells the story, not just of the composer or performer, but of those who listen. John Denver, Simon and Garfunkel, the Eagles, America, the Carpenters, Blood, Sweat and Tears, Joni Mitchell, and so many other groups and individuals I can't think of at the moment gave their music to me at critical points in my journey. And there were also the hopeful hymns and religious songs that at times meant so much to me.

From my adolescence in the Vietnam War and Civil Rights years, came many songs of justice, peace, even revolution. Later, environmental songs joined peace songs and Civil Rights songs among my favorite and most often sung and played songs. Some songs dropped away, forgotten as times changed and I grew older, but many I have carried with me for decades, songs of my lifetime, songs of my journey. When I sing We Shall Overcome, I only look in the songbook for the order of the verses. Similarly, when I sing Holly Near's song, We are a Gentle, Angry, People, I just need to remind myself of the order or pick the verses for a particular service. Also with Carolyn McDade's Come, Sing a Song with Me. With Jim Scott's Gather the Spirit, I do have to look because there are so many good words! Our UU Hymnal offers a tremendous treasure trove of songs and readings, though there are a few that are too hard to sing! As a former Methodist, it was wonderful to find so many familiar tunes with different words, along with others I had not known before.

Sometimes as my journey has taken me to new places, I have been able to bring music I have enjoyed to new choirs and congregations. If I like a piece, I will often make or buy a copy, and I have been known to buy a songbook or album just for one or two pieces I really wanted to have.

Music is said to soothe the savage beast. Certain music can disturb or comfort animals as well as people. When music touches the soul, it becomes part of our journey. Mothers sing to their children, lovers serenade each other, field workers as well as the military have their working and marching songs. Most religious communities sing or make instrumental music. Most people make music in some way!

We tell our stories when we share our songs. We tell where we are from, and we tell what moments in history shaped our lives. We sing our beliefs and we sing our hopes and dreams. Music welcomes us into this world and music will be there as we leave this life. May each of our days be filled with music!

Shalom, Salaam, Blessed Be, Namaste, Amen & Alleluia!

And now I invite you to share your music!