

## Sermon 2023 09 10 Text

One of the earliest and most enduring memories I hold of my mother is of her singing.

She never sang formally as part of a choir or anything like that; but as she went about the tasks of the days she would sing. I am not sure if she was conscious of it or if it just came out.

=====

And I am not sure if it was hard-wired into her or if it was part of her DNA, but it was certainly an integral part of her and something which I have inherited.

Sometimes I will find myself working away at some task of the day and notice that I am singing. Or someone will ask me what I am singing, and I cannot answer the question because the music has come from some deep unconscious place, and I have not been aware of it.

=====

One thing I do know, is that if I do not occasionally notice that I am singing then there is something very wrong in the deep places of my existence.

=====

From the first five verses of Psalm 149 which we read earlier:-

### **Psalm 149**

<sup>1</sup> O praise the Lord, and sing to the Lord a new song:

O praise him in the assembly of the faithful.

<sup>2</sup> Let Israel rejoice in him that made him:

let the children of Zion be joyful in their king.

<sup>3</sup> Let them praise him in the dance:

let them sing his praise with timbrel and with harp.

<sup>4</sup> For the Lord takes delight in his people:

he adorns the meek with his salvation.

<sup>5</sup> Let his faithful ones exult in his glory:

let them sing for joy upon their beds.

=====

While this is a general instruction for daily life, it is a very specific instruction for the manner in which we must worship.

But in some sense, I think, we have absorbed a completely different lesson.

We have been taught to come into and leave church buildings in a quiet manner so that we do not disturb the prayers of others.

And this is absolutely correct. We need quietness before and after our worship so that others may pray and prepare themselves for the worship that is soon to begin.

And we need to understand why that quietness is essential. People need to gather their thoughts in moving from a worldly space into a sacred place. They need time and quiet to adjust their minds and their bodies into the place of worship. And they need that quietness so that they may converse with God.

Too often we only think of prayer in terms of what we say to God. But that is significantly less than half the process. We also need times for hearing and times for reflecting. We learn to enter in quietness, and to hold that quietness so that we and others may silently speak to God, listen for God's response to

those hard wrung prayers and then to reflect on their meaning for us.

=====

So we have developed appropriate behaviours for entering and leaving and for part of our behaviour within sacred space.

What we need to recognise is that when a service begins we move from our individual occupancy of this space into a corporate or community occupation of the space.

In this redefined space where we move from being on our own to being together we need to lose the quietness and the soft humility of our voices.

=====

Our focus changes from quiet gratitude and reflection to a louder celebration of our unity in God and the process of remembrance.

That is not to say we shout or yell, but it does mean that we lift our voices in praise, in gratitude for the amazing love of God who comes to us in different ways when we are together.

=====

Please do not see this as a criticism, but as failure to teach the lesson that in our coming together as a community our voices must be lifted up. Those voices intertwine as we become one people, one community, one family meeting together in joyful thanksgiving.

And in the other spheres of our lives, when we meet together in that way the sound of the community increases.

=====

Sometimes it is a struggle to hear the combined response of whole congregation and I make the assumption that people have replied.

Sometimes I feel that in the poverty of my voice, I am singing as a soloist.

=====

There must be a lot of spare research money out there.

Some researchers have studied the dynamics of communities and particularly church communities. And what they have found is that when a community responds positively and in volume, the qualitative experience of each member of that community is increased. That is to say, the energy we invest into our process of worship determines the outcome for us of that worship.

And that is a reflection of a simple truth, the more you invest in places of quality, the more you get back in return for that investment.

People who invest more in their participation in the process of worship are moved into healthier positive states than those who sit and stand at the appropriate moments and offer quiet responses and singing.

And when we carry the quality of those responses into the outside world we find ourselves more richly blessed in terms of

relationship, physical and mental health, and the minute by minute quality of each day.

Your graduation examination:

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

=====

We sing a new song to God. We praise him in our corporate worship. We rejoice, we dance, we sing. And in that God delights in his people and he adorns them with his salvation.

=====