

It was a way of introducing ourselves to the group. We were to share our favorite hymn and tell why it was meaningful to us. This is always difficult for me. It always depends. Maybe it has to do with my mood or need at the moment. It may just be the last hymn I heard. It changes almost from day to day. I mean I found myself whistling “Be Still My Soul” walking down the hallway this morning. There are hymns that have special meaning to me, they remind of people who have been a part of my life. “In the Garden” reminds of a colleague in ministry who would leave the room whenever this hymn was played or sung. We never knew why but there was something she disliked about this particular hymn. Or, whenever I hear “Rock of Ages” I think of my grandmother. This was her dusting hymn. She seldom whistled—only when she dusted and only this particular hymn. Again, I don’t know why. Music is so much a part of our lives, a part of the language and history of the church: *“And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”*

The music of our faith is often songs sung in the night. Music has long played a role in the celebrating of our faith (it does make things easier to remember!). Moses in Exodus 15 composes and sings a song in celebration of God’s deliverance of the people from the oppression in Egypt. Miriam joins in and grabs a tambourine and dances and sings a praise chorus (Ex. 15:21). The Psalms often speak of the instruments used in the praise and worship of God: cymbals, drums, tambourines, trumpets, lyres and harps. In II Chronicles 29:27-28 we read: *“As the offering began, singing to the Lord began also, accompanied by the trumpets and the instruments of David, king of Israel. The whole assembly bowed in worship, while the singers sang and the trumpeters played.”* Now, I imagine they were singing out – I mean you don’t sing quietly while accompanied by trumpets! Maybe when Jim plays the flute for us, but not when someone is accompanying the singing with trumpets.

We know that many of the Psalms were written for use in worship, songs to be sung in praise of God. In II Samuel 19:35 the writer asks, *“Can I still hear the voices of the men and women singers?”* Even women were allowed to use their voices and sing praises to God. The 98th Psalm that we read this morning speaks of the need to sing new songs to the Lord. God is active in the world and new activities of God require new songs of praise and adoration.

The Psalm teaches that all creation is a song of praise to God: The roar of the sea; the sound of wind through the trees; the flowing waters of the rivers and streams. All of these are songs of praise to God. Isaiah 55:12 says, *“You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and*

hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.” All creation is music and praise to God.

Music was even part of the great celebrations of the people of God, including Passover. By the time of Christ the Passover Seder had come to have a traditional form. Most agree that at some point in the services Psalms 113-118 were sung. Now various “authorities” add other songs that may have been included but most agree that this section of the Psalms were an integral part of the Passover meal. Singing was to be a part of the celebration. A celebration of what God had done—rescued and redeemed from bondage in Egypt. A celebration of what God was now doing – God is here and active in the world. And, a celebration of what God had promised to do – a place would be set at the table for Elijah and the door would remain open for him to come and join in the meal. It was also eaten in expectation of what God was going to do in the future.

And, “*When they had sung a hymn...*” Listen to the words that they would have sung if they used Psalm 118 as the final song of the evening before leaving the upper room.

I will give you thanks, for you have answered me; you have become my salvation. The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone, the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

O lord, save us; O Lord, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we bless you. The Lord is God and he has made his light shine upon us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.

You are my God, and I will give you thanks; you are my God, and I will exalt you. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. (21-29)

This would be a portion of the song sung in the night. The Passover meal has to be eaten between sunset and sunrise. They had gone through the ancient ritual of the meal. The menu had been the traditional menu of the generations. The meal progressed as it had done for centuries, changed only when Jesus spoke in the blessing of the bread and in the taking of the cup: *This is my body broken. This is my blood shed. Whenever you gather, take, eat and drink in remembrance of me.* Henceforth, this meal would take on a new significance. In fact, all meals should take on a new meaning...when you eat the bread and drink the cup. They would continue to fellowship but before they left they would sing a hymn.

The songs would also take on new meaning and insight. It would become a part of their faith: faith sung in praise to God. The songs would remind them of the coming hope, their past redemption and God's eternal presence in their and in our lives.

When I think of the hymns of our faith, our songs in the night, I think of Sarah. I did not meet Sarah until she was very sick. She was the wife of a former pastor of one of the congregations I served. They had retired to Florida but when she became ill they moved back to New England to be closer to family. She had an infection that was eating away at her brain. She was in a constant state of turmoil and could no longer be cared for at home. She was restrained to keep her from hurting herself as she continually thrashed in her bed. We were there one Sunday, the choir gathered around her bed and sang an old hymn of faith. The nurse noticed that while they sang Sarah was completely still – the torment of her body stopped for those few short minutes. She rushed and found a tape player and a tape. It didn't work (country music – sorry, country fans). One of the choir members rushed to their car and brought in a tape of hymns. As it played Sarah was relaxed. So relaxed that while they played the tapes she could be unrestrained. Let the music stop and torment would come. Her comfort was found in the “songs in the night.” The songs of hope and faith.

As we come to this table we remember that night in the upper room. We remember the words of Jesus as he took the bread and broke it. We remember his words as he took the cup and blessed and shared it. We recall the past redemptive work of God in Egypt and the coming redemptive work of Christ on the cross. We remember many aspects of the meal and they speak to us. We also need to remember the songs sung in the night. The songs that told the story and continue to tell the story of God's redeeming love and work--- *“And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”*