

“Sing for Joy”

1 Chronicles 15:25-29, 16:23-37; Col. 3:12-17  
John 6:66-69, Matt. 26:26-30

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There was a woman and a young child walking down the street. The child was somewhere around two, doing those things a child does, curious about whatever she saw. The mother, every now and then, was asking her to hurry along. As they walked along, they found some folks along the road playing music. The little girl stopped and listened and watched. The mother watched the daughter. She thought, “Her head is moving right in time. No, not just her head but her whole body is moving right in time with that music.” The mother wondered if the music would stay with her. What will become of my daughter?

Have you ever done that as a parent? Stood there and watched, especially when they were really young, wondering what their life would be. What would become of them? We can imagine that mother standing as the child heard the music, wondering what would become of her. Would the music last? Would it stick with her? If we fast forward through her life, we might notice that indeed it did. Perhaps, she even learned to play. She might have even been one of those who is not only interested in learning to play, but how to do it better. So, as she watched the blacksmith’s bellows and heard the noise coming out, she wondered if she couldn’t put the two together: the bellows and the flute.

Though her life, music was central. I can imagine her mother watching her across the years and seeing her develop the joy of music. When she became a member of this new sect that was gaining in popularity but still not sanctioned, perhaps she wondered how it would turn out. If we kept going with this particular life, at least as the story goes, she became active in her church, preaching and teaching. It is said she brought 400 people to faith. She gained the reputation that brought her to the attention of the authorities so that eventually she was martyred.

This is, of course, the story of St. Cecilia. As you might suspect, I don’t really know what the mother thought. I don’t really know how the story went. There is some suggestion that she might have been the inventor of the organ, but that is probably not true. The idea of the bellows and the pipe and the flute. And, while we recognize that the story is a story, it identifies something about a person who lived long ago and some of the pieces that have been added to it make it a great story. Perhaps, a teaching story. She, after all, became a saint. They say that when she was martyred, it didn’t go quickly. She had several days in which to put her affairs in order and to give her house to the pope as a church. There are all these ways of thinking about this person we call St. Cecilia. Perhaps not all accurate, but a description of a person’s life of faith, a teaching story in that respect.

The funny thing about preaching on St. Cecelia is that generally, Presbyterians don't think much about saints. The saints are all of you, anyone who has taken Christ as their savior. So, to have a St. Cecelia is a little unusual in a Presbyterian church and yet, we can think of a person's life and how she dedicated herself to Christ. Out of that comes this legend, really, about who she was and it teaches us what a life of faith is about. She also becomes one who can be associated with the wonder of music, especially music as we use it to praise and give thanks to God. Certainly, that's scriptural. We see David doing that way back in Chronicles. We see Jesus doing it with the disciples. We hear Paul telling us to do it in Colossians. It's kind of nice to have a shorthand way of saying something that has a lot of depth. And so, we can talk about St. Cecilia as the patron saint of music, particularly of church music. It's interesting that it even shows up in pop music. There are a number of songs that have St. Cecilia in them. It's possible that Paul Simon's song 'Cecilia' is about the difficulty of trying to write music because 'Cecilia' points to St. Cecilia who points to the wonder of music and the difficulty sometimes of making it work, making it happen.

So, we have two things going on, as I think about it. One is we have St. Cecilia helping us think about how we have this gift of music that we can use to express our thanks, our praise. We can use the gift of music to express the glory and goodness of God. It's a way we can worship together, to lift our voices in song, hear the wonderful music, and experience the harmonies, the rhythms and the joy of those who perform music. On one side, that is what St. Cecilia helps us think about.

I think there is a second side of thinking about this. Not only was her life one of the joy of music but also the joy of faith and how she lived that faith out, giving of herself to others, following Christ, serving with love. That, also, in a way, is the music of faith that has a particular way of being written in our lives. So, it says in Colossians, "Above all else, clothe yourselves with love so you might bind yourselves together in harmony." It's that idea that by our faith we begin to create music together. The way we do that is the way we live out our lives in love, clothing ourselves with love, playing the notes of the music of our lives. In doing that, we create the harmonies.

As we think of St. Cecilia, we can think of two things, both the joys we have in the gift of music that we can use to express the wonder of what God has done in our lives, and the wonder of who God is. And, we can think about how, when we follow Christ, there is a way the strains of our lives, the chords that we play through the love and forgiveness we give create the harmony of life. I think then we can lead lives that sing in joy. Amen.