

Call to Worship

Wesley's Directions for Singing

Sing them exactly as they are printed here, without altering or mending them at all;

**And if you have learned to sing them otherwise, unlearn it as soon as you can.**

Prayer of Invocation

**Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, and we shall be created and you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations, through Christ the Lord, Amen.**

The Word

Psalm 100

**Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come into his presence with singing. Know that the LORD is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name. For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.**

Living the Word

In one of my former vocations I worked at a hardware store. When things got quiet, between customers, I was 'invited' to put together things like shelving units that came in pieces in a box. After one or two of them, I thought that I no longer needed the directions to complete the project. This worked OK some of the time, but occasionally I would finish the project with pieces or screws left over, thus having to check and sometimes reworking to get to where I had missed, before completing the project.

I also had the opportunity on occasion to mix paint for people. If I had diligently read the directions each time, I may have gotten the cover on tighter before I put that one gallon of paint into the shaker and made such a mess of things. Trust me, that only happened once!

We do get wiser with time and experience, and so the first I-book that I downloaded on my new I-Pad, was 'How to use your I-Pad.' God gave us via Moses, the Ten Commandments, not as restrictions for our lives, but directions to give us direction to guide our lives - so they can be richer, better, more whole.

It's hard to imagine hymns as something new, daring, even mildly subversive, but in the eighteenth century they were not only a novelty, their use in parish churches was strictly speaking - illegal. Until about 1700 both Anglican and nonconformist congregations sang almost nothing but the psalms, to a limited number of tunes.

The new forms, now called hymns, were seized on with enthusiasm by John Wesley and his brother Charles who made hymn-singing an important feature of their ministry. The Wesley's appeal was largely to the working classes and their hymns were often used in large open-air meetings.

The Methodists soon began to write new tunes for their hymns in an unashamedly secular style which would not have been out of place in the theatre, the pleasure gardens, or even the tavern. It was this which so shocked the Establishment and delayed the introduction of hymns into parish churches. Such was the popularity of hymn-singing however, that by the end of the century it was widespread in nearly all denominations.

The Wesley brothers were very passionate about the hymns. During his lifetime, brother Charles wrote the words to over 7000 hymns, one of which is *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing*. I often wonder when I hear that one being played in the malls during Advent if Charles would be glad or cringing at the thought...

John was always very concerned about how things were done. He had a 'method' for everything – and so came the name we wear now: 'The Methodist.' His directions for singing are an example of his methodology. If you are going to sing - follow these directions, John Wesley wrote in 1761. John had a desire, inspired by God, to build the faith of all people through preaching and song.

We clearly feel his passion in direction #7: Above all sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing [God] more than yourself, or any other creature. In order to do this attend strictly to the sense of what you sing, and see that your heart is not carried away with the sound, but offered to God continually; so shall your singing be such as the Lord will approve here, and reward you when [God] cometh in the clouds of heaven.

The Scripture we shared together was one of 150 Psalms recorded for us because they were the words that the Old Testament People sang as they addressed God. We sang it to the tune entitled '*The Old Hundredth*,' when we sang "*All People that on Earth Do Dwell*"

*Make a joyful noise, all the earth.* The praise of God is for the whole world and all people receive an invitation in those words; there is a place for everyone in the Kingdom of God. *Come into God's presence with singing.* We are being invited to come in and worship, not some far off God, but a God who wants a personal relationship with each of us. *God made us and we are God's.* God created us, we did not create ourselves. As we repeat, or sing the words of this Psalm, we once again acknowledge who we are and whose we are.

These are some of God's directions for us, received via David. David became the embodiment of the Psalms. Notations in the margins of these ancient Psalms refer to David, but they are not to imply that he was the author of all of them, but rather they were written for David or in honor of David. David started the 'psalm' movement.

Just as the ancient people of God sang Psalms, we sing the hymns and choruses to God, many of which are based on scriptures. Did you know that there is an index in the hymnal, just to help you find what scriptures each hymn is based on. Even today, the contemporary praise songs include the Psalms. Chris Tomlin wrote these words: Give thanks to the Lord our God and King, His love endures forever  
For He is good, He is above all things His love endures forever. Sing praise, sing praise.

With a mighty hand and outstretched arm, His love endures forever, For the life that's been reborn,  
His love endures forever. Sing praise, sing praise. Forever God is faithful, Forever God is strong, Forever God is with us, Forever

From the rising to the setting sun, His love endures forever, And by the grace of God we will carry on, His love endures forever. Sing praise, sing praise. Forever God is faithful, Forever God is strong  
Forever God is with us, Forever. The title of that song is 'Forever.'

I have heard some people say they don't really care for the contemporary praise songs, because they keep saying the same thing over and over. Let me read you the first four verses of Psalm 118: "*O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good. God's love endures forever!. Let Israel say: His steadfast Love endures forever. Let the house of Aaron say: His steadfast Love endures forever. Let those who honor the Lord say: His steadfast Love endures forever.*"

Psalms, hymns and choruses, can draw out of us emotions, tied by history and the mood from the words and the music. In the weeks to come we will explore some of the emotions that the Psalms can help us express.  
Whenever I sing "*Shall We Gather at the River*" I feel a bonding spirit in the words 'we and gather.'

As a lifelong United Methodist, I have always felt that I belonged to something bigger than just myself. I have grown into that belonging so well that I yearn for the week of Annual Conference so I could go and sing in the company of my Colleagues from all across the state, many of which are more family than friends.

Whenever I sing "*I have Decided to Follow Jesus*" My emotions take a quick journey back to preteen years and then quickly forward. My cousins attended a church of a different denomination, and they let me know that I wasn't good enough to sing melody when we practices to perform this song for our grandparents. Not only did they have better voices than I, but they could name the date and time when they had gone to the front of the church and accepted Jesus Christ as their personal savior.

My conversion happened more gradually than theirs, but eventually I had the realization that I was also ready to sing this song with conviction in my heart. It is good when not so good memories are replaced with good ones. I appreciate the words much more now than when I was young.

You have a choice to sing or not. If someone in your past convinced you that you have a poor singing voice, then I invite you to hold on to Psalm 100, which reminded us that we only have to make a joyful noise!

The Psalms and our hymns tell who we are and what we believe, as the people of God, as Christians, as human beings. Within the words is found our theology. Do you know what theology is? It is the study of God that Theologians do. That is you! Whenever you think about God or wonder about creation, or process the words of the scriptures...and hymns, you become a Theologian. Be a theologian with the hymns; read and think about the words you are singing. Explore who God is and who you are as you process the words.

One of the songs I sang at Annual Conference began with these words: 'You are holy, you are wholeness.' Singing these two phrases together gave me the new understanding. When I think of God as Holy, my thoughts go to the Almighty far off on a cloud somewhere, unreachable. Yet the word wholeness brings Christ to me, one who walked on earth to let us know that God wants wholeness for all of us and isn't far off at all. 'God is holy,' and we can't sing that enough.

Now adding 'God is wholeness' is a reminder that if we want to be whole ourselves, we need to stay focused on our creator. Wholeness is a physical/spiritual place that we can strive for. The church is good at praising God, with the name 'holy,' but 'wholeness' is something as a church, we haven't spoken of as well. Our work is helping all people of God find wholeness for their lives. As I processed these two words, as a theologian – in conversation with God, I found new direction for my life and my work.

*"O, Who will build the church now?"* has meaning for the church in Kenya as they come together to actually build the buildings of the church. When it is sung by 1200 lay people and clergy at the Wisconsin Annual Conference, we are looking to the future of the United Methodist Church, which has been declining and it becomes a marching song for a people.

As I shared it this morning, it became an invitation to this church to remember that it takes all of us together to build up this church. Each psalm, hymn and chorus have meanings from God, and that meaning can be different in different times and places. It is a catchy tune. I have been singing it for six years, since I learned it. I hope it enters your soul and you will ruminate on the words... "Oh, Who will build the church now? The Mamas & Papas (repeat) E Yo, Yo, Y o, Yo (4x)- E Yo." Verse 2: the Elders & Children, Verse 3: We'll build it together."

We are not going to belabor the directions we have heard this morning, as I hope you will find the meaning God has for you in each one. God has reinforced the directions for singing throughout history; the 7 directions from Wesley are a part of that. Wesley has given us another tool to build our faith and understanding.

Anytime you need reminding, I invite you to turn in your hymnal to the page before the Contents page. You can have a chuckle at the wording if you like, but pay attention to how God might be directing you to sing and live your life.

You may find a word here or there that you aren't familiar with, hold on to it, take it home and look it up somewhere. I puzzled over the word 'thither' (spell) for a few years. We would sing it every Christmas, but it was such a busy time that it wasn't until I could hold on to it for a few days to remember to look it up. Now the word 'Thither' has great meaning, but if you aren't willing to explore you may not get it. The Christmas Carol I am referring to is 'O Come All Ye Faithful' which brings to mind images of everyone, and I mean everyone being invited to come together for Christmas.

On Christmas Eve there are images of everyone moving toward Christ. The line is 'We, too, would Thither.' So of course the meaning of the word 'thither' is to move toward something. It all makes so much more sense for us now. So come on you 'Methodists', use the tools and see what you can find in the words that are being sung and we will spend the summer finding the understandings and emotions for ourselves through the psalms.