

**Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles**  
**Fifth Sunday After Pentecost – June 17, 2018 – Fathers' Day / Choir Day**  
**Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister**  
**Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15**

**FOR REFLECTION**

“Can't carry a tune; can't carry a tune in a bushel basket; can't carry a tune in a bucket;  
can't carry a tune in a paper sack.

Fig. [to be] unable to sing a simple melody; lacking musical ability.”

~ McGraw-Hill Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal Verbs. © 2002

**Tunes in a Bucket**

My father has never been able to carry a tune – in a bucket, a basket or a paper sack. Singing next to him in church during a hymn creates a pleasant dissonance and a desire to protect him – from what, I'm not sure – perhaps needless critique. He can usually get the ups and downs of the melody and approximate the rhythm. It's the actual notes he misses by a couple of hairs.

I found it interesting that he could always whistle right on key. During my childhood his favorite was “Rock of Ages” and, with a hearty whistle, he nailed it. I believe he was in his 50's when he took some voice lessons – the point of which I never knew. But we all found out from his voice teacher that Dad could sing in three octaves – and his issue was never knowing which octave he was in. Impressive.

The lessons didn't last but his singing continues to amuse us and endear him to us. And the man loves hymns. He also loves sea chanties and folk songs – especially Pete Seeger's “Rainbow Race.” And he loves Joe Lawrence and the choir – you all get him crying every time. He may have started coming here to support me – but now he comes for you. Thank you for that gift to my father.

And be aware that its not JUST that your music is beautiful – meaningful – leading to many emotional responses. My Dad loves G-d – truly, madly, deeply. He has loved G-d longer and more consistently than I ever have. I've taken a few breaks in my life to argue with, fight with – do away with the concept of G-d due to some deep disagreements about some things. But Dad is enamored of his Maker – the Captain of his ship – the Creator of the Universe. And you enable him to do with style what Psalm 92 declares to be good:

1 It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; 2 to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night...

with the music [and] the melody of your instruments.

Many people come to worship specifically for the music. I know I do. (I certainly don't come for the preaching...) It is the visceral experience of vibrations in the ear that move us to states of mind and heart that we might call "spiritual" or "meditative" or "ecstatic."

I am also affected by the obvious community that IS the choir –  
the intertwining of voices in a duet –  
looks exchanged during a particular passage –  
the support the men give to one another when the bases take the melody –  
the obvious pleasure you all have in sharing music you love with an audience –  
especially when the congregation outnumbered the choir.

And it is obvious by the passion of your singing that you love G-d as much as my Dad does. Maybe as much as Jesus loved the one he called "Abba – Father" – sometimes translated as "Daddy."

I wonder what Jesus sounded like when he sang. We don't talk much about that in church – his singing or his laughter. But someone like Jesus MUST have done both – boldly and with gusto. The singing at the Temple would have been obviously part of his life – and one definitely does NOT have to carry a tune when singing prayers. (I know this from a recent Bat Mitzvah Dad and I attended in Glendale.) Jesus was a man who ate and drank with gusto – so he MUST have sung with friends at table or while lounging around someone's home.

I wonder what his favorite kind of music was – Israeli wedding and dance tunes? Arabic folk songs? Egyptian pop songs heard as a baby?  
And I wonder if he was able to carry a tune in a bucket or a basket –  
if he sang off-key which is why no one mentions it in the gospels –  
if he enjoyed the singing of his mom and dad  
or the cantor at synagogue or random people at the market.

And I wonder now if the children we have torn away from their parents at the border and are holding in cages and cells –  
I wonder if they sing to each other or to themselves as they ponder their fate.  
I wonder if they remember the lullabies of their father or their mother as they sob themselves to sleep at night with no arms to rock them.  
I wonder if a kind guard, now and then, walks the hallways and sings folk songs in Spanish to comfort them.

I wonder if familiar hymns play in their heads as they pray to G-d to give them back to their parents.

I wonder if brown-skinned Jesus comes to them in their dreams –  
whistling or humming –  
singing quiet songs off-key –  
lovingly cradling their traumatized souls –  
and whispering to their hearts that they are going to be okay.

I wonder if the parents of these children send love songs to G-d –  
and ask G-d to deliver them to their babies – wherever they may be.

I pray that all families will be reunited with speed and care in the coming days...  
I pray that our political system will bend once again toward mercy and compassion  
responding to the pressure of our words and actions, songs and protests...  
I pray that G-d will hear the music of our prayers and praises –  
turn to all in need with uncompromising steadfast love and faithfulness –  
and strengthen all of us as we work to repair the world –  
one child, one song at a time.

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**Scripture Reading for Sunday June 17, 2018 – Fifth after Pentecost – Year B**

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**Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15**

1 It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; 2 to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night, 3 to the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre.

4 For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy.

12 The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

13 They are planted in the house of the LORD; they flourish in the courts of our God.

14 In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap, 15 showing that the LORD is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

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## Rainbow Race

One blue sky above us  
One ocean lapping all our shore  
One earth so green and round  
Who could ask for more  
And because I love you  
I'll give it one more try  
To show my rainbow race  
It's too soon to die.

Some folks want to be like an ostrich,  
Bury their heads in the sand.  
Some hope that plastic dreams  
Can unclench all those greedy hands.  
Some hope to take the easy way:  
Poisons, bombs. They think we need 'em.  
Don't you know you can't kill all the unbelievers?  
There's no shortcut to freedom. (the dream)

One blue sky above us  
One ocean lapping all our shore  
One earth so green and round  
Who could ask for more  
And because I love you  
I'll give it one more try  
To show my rainbow race  
It's too soon to die.

Go tell, go tell all the little children.  
Tell all the mothers and fathers too.  
Now's our last chance to learn to share  
What's been given to me and you.

One blue sky above us  
One ocean lapping all our shore  
One earth so green and round  
Who could ask for more  
And because I love you  
I'll give it one more try  
To show my rainbow race  
It's too soon to die.

Songwriters: Peter Seeger  
My Rainbow Race lyrics © The Bicycle Music Company