

Welcoming one Another:

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord. Perhaps you're asking yourselves what happens when all you have are groans too weak for words? Our groans often turn into longing for peace. It's peace that we can start with here and now. Once again we gather to say, "Let there be peace on Earth, and let it begin with me..." Please take a moment to pass that sacred peace this morning.

Sermon:

Listen Closely – Music Sunday (JUNE 12, 2016)

Ned Allyn Parker

“Heaven’s morning breaks, and earth’s vain shadows flee: in life, in death, O Lord, abide with me...” We reflect on our mortality and our hope when we sing this hymn in preparation for prayer on Sundays and also during memorial services when we remember those we’ve lost. We are reminded, as we sing it now, that death will not have the final word – though in death, we are sometimes forced to make sense out of senselessness... through acts of violence, like the tragedy that unfolded in Orlando last night, even the music we want to sing gets choked in our throats. Sometimes when we don’t know what to say in the aftermath of an

event like this one, lifting our voices together in familiar songs fills in the words we cannot find the strength to sing or speak on our own.

You may have seen that Jim posted Psalm 42 on our website this morning:

I say to God, my rock: "Why have you forgotten me? Why do you keep me in mourning, oppressed by an unseen enemy?"

My bones are shattered by their words, foes taunt me constantly: "Where is your God?" they say.

"Why so dispirited? I ask myself. "Why so churned up inside? Hope in God!"

I know I'll praise God once again, for you are my Deliverance; you are my God.

In the face of tragedy, in the context of mourning, we seek the ever-present peace of a God who abides...

Following my reflection, we will move to the hymn, "God of Grace and God of Laughter," and sing the words: "Turn our **sighing** into singing, music born of hope restored..." From a hymn about loss to a hymn about

laughter; from death to life. If you *listen closely*, today is a resurrection experience through hymns.

We sing in celebration; we sing in desolation; we sing in anticipation; we sing in exultation. The *music* cradles us; it transforms us.

My former professor, Burns Stanfield, used to say: “Well, you don’t leave worship humming the sermon.”

If we listen closely, these familiar hymns we sing today remind us that we are a diverse community of faith exploring what it means to follow the way of Jesus Christ; if *you* listen closely, perhaps these hymns will remind *you* that you are a beloved child of God.

They tell us something about... us... as sacred, matter-of-fact, authentic expressions of our most genuine selves.

We live our lives in hope, in love, in joy, in thanksgiving, in doubt – and all of these are expressed through the sacred music we share – through postludes, preludes, anthems and hymns. The hymns rest on our hearts when we are most jubilant and most distressed even when we don’t

recognize that our mouths sound their words, and our feet tap their rhythms.

Listening closely to hymns doesn't only mean appreciating them for appreciation's sake. It means understanding why we respond to them the way we do; it means learning to ask questions about God and our neighbor as a result of singing these lyrics; it means coming to terms with – or sometimes questioning – words that make us uncomfortable.

As we learn to listen closely to hymns, we might develop the capacity to listen to, and engage with the world in new and more compassionate ways.

And... if we listen still deeper, we will encounter the boundless churning hum of a greater hymn – the living hymn of all creation. Life is an ode to joy, a hallelujah chorus; it's full of amazing grace and blessed assurance.

||

It's music. All of it, music.

Even in the quiet rhythm of our breathing and the labored beating of our hearts...

Even in the soft sound a Number 2 pencil makes when it scrawls a question mark at the end of a sentence...

... the infinitesimal whisper of pollen slipping free from petals...

... the wild charge of parents protecting their child...

And, of course, in the depression of pedals and keys and the blast of pipes hidden from sight behind screens not meant for quiet confession...

The great celestial hum.

God's pervasive Om.

The creaks of our earthly home.

We don't always know where it comes from, or really where it goes -

– perhaps out to the singularity, where there is no time, no us, no

conflict -

– only God, and the gentle cacophony of music.

The symphony of a trillion planets,

a billion stars,

a million solar systems,

one universe –

the polyrhythms of people and creatures and oceans
and storms.

The ongoing exhale of the great “I Am...”

Still **sighing**, still speaking, still singing.

Listen closely. Don't be afraid. The prophet Isaiah writes, “The mountains and hills burst forth into song, and the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”

So, listen for the sounds of the mighty hymn that surrounds you... and when you hear it, do not harden your hearts.

Listen. Laugh. Love...

...and lift your spirit in this great hymn of all creation – even as you lift your voices in our closing hymn for worship.

For the Benediction:

Isaiah 55:12 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

12 For you shall go out in joy,

and be led back in peace;

the mountains and the hills before you

shall burst into song,

and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.