

Most of us were involved in worship this morning with a different set of lectionary texts. I was one of those and preached on today's gospel. I'll get around to the reading you just heard from Paul's Letter to the Philippians—a beautiful text—but I'm going to say a word first about that epistle we heard this morning from James because it is that text that has been running through my head as I've thought about this gathering.

I will say from the outset that a Lutheran pastor speaking on a text from James is a bit strange. Martin Luther, a Roman Catholic monk and Biblical scholar, called this an “epistle of straw.” He described it as a few sayings of the apostles chaotically “tossed on paper.” To his mind, talk of works as essential to faith revealed errant theological understanding given the fundamental tenet of the Christian faith as he had come to understand it—justification by grace through faith alone.

And, frankly, today's epistle lectionary selection from James didn't have a lot of gospel, “good news,” in it. It was essentially an admonishment, a warning for us to guard the power of a little member within us—our tongue. Just as a small fire can set a forest ablaze so is the power of this little member of our body. “No one,” said this passage from James, “can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison.” Yikes! Yes, says this text, the tongue can be used to bless the Lord, but so can it be used to curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth, both blessing and cursing. And once our tongues let loose whatever they're drawn to put out there, there's no taking it back.

That's a pretty heavy responsibility to ponder when you are a preacher who deals in words. It can make the Quaker tradition of silence seem pretty appealing. We come from a tradition that realizes the power of words but also the limitation of words. Sometimes words are misconstrued, they can be ill-informed, they can be used to hurt. Sometimes they're just not adequate. Words fail to capture the depth of feelings within our souls, whether it be of great spiritual joy or of great angst and sorrow.

Enter in the power of music—music that speaks to those deep feelings within us. I dare say that all of you organists gathered here tonight are classically trained musicians, schooled in the great classical composers of our western heritage. You have dedicated your lives to expressing those compositions in ways that cause our spirits to soar, that express and carry us through the travails of this life, and that can fill our hearts with hope and peace. Two summers years ago I was in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. You will recall that this was the epicenter of the massive earthquake and tsunami of 2004. What you may not know is that this northern most region of Indonesia had been a separate kingdom, kind of like Hawai'i's past relative to the United States. For almost 30 years prior to the tsunami, a guerrilla separatist movement had operated in that region. Nearly 15,000 people had died in the conflict; others disappeared. People told me that the warfare years were actually worse than the tsunami because no one ever felt safe. The aftermath of the tsunami brought peace talks and a resolution to the separatist issue. A new day began in Aceh. While visiting one of the Islamic boarding schools in an outlying area, the Head of School and a cleric told me that his vision was to start a string orchestra. A string orchestra, I asked, Why? Because, he said, he believes it is critical to instill in his students a feeling and commitment for peace and understanding across religions and

cultures. He said in the eyes of many, orchestras are seen not only as Western but specifically as Christian. It was his belief, however, that the power of this music comes from a place within the human soul that transcends religion and culture. He believed providing an orchestra experience for his students would foster peacemaking not only in the lives of the students but as a witness within the larger community as well.

Certainly all of us, even those of us who work with words more than musical notes, understand what this Head of School and Islamic imam was talking about—the power of music to touch deep within us, to express the depths of our spiritual connectedness, and to move us as a people toward higher reaches than we may have imagined possible.

Some of you gathered here not only bring this music to life for us, but also compose your own song and verse. It seems only fitting as we gather together in this place and celebrate the installation of officers to the local chapter of the American Guild of Organists that we remember a woman whose soul spoke most prolifically through music, who learned to play on the first pipe organ brought to these islands by members of Kawaiaha'o Church, and who was baptized at St. Andrews. I am, of course, speaking of Queen Lili'uokalani, the last monarch of the Hawaiian Kingdom. Regarded as an accomplished musician and composer who wrote over a hundred songs, melodies, and translations, she was eventually baptized by Bishop Alfred Willis, a staunch opponent to Hawai'i's annexation and the last Anglican bishop before the bishopric was handed over to the American church. Today many of our churches in the islands still sing the Queen's Prayer as a regular part of the Sunday liturgy. It speaks of incredible faith and trust in the midst of persecution and sorrow. You who are church musicians in these islands

continue that tradition which Queen Lili'uokalani embraced so deeply and which gave her such hope and comfort.

Hymnody adds another dimension to our worship music with its special combination of music and verse. I don't know about you, but there are many times when I find a hymn running through my head that exactly speaks to whatever situation I am facing. It IS a form of prayer. Hymns unite us in raising our voices in praise and thanksgiving. They call us to accountability in Christian discipleship, and provide hope, comfort, and counsel. I particularly like the hymn with which we opened today's worship, "When in our music God is glorified."—and that's exactly right! The tune and text compliment each other so well that God is indeed glorified! This hymn happens to be a partnership between a clergyperson and a musician. Sir Charles Villiers Stanford, who wrote the music of this hymn, was an accomplished Irish composer, teacher, conductor, and organist, who composed a substantial number of concert works, including seven symphonies, but whose best-remembered pieces are his choral works for churches, especially in the Anglican tradition—an example being the *Te Deum* which the choir sang following the reading. Englishman Fred Pratt Green who wrote the text was a Methodist minister who didn't turn his attention to writing hymns in earnest until after his retirement from parish ministry. During his 70s and 80s, he composed an impressive amount of material that earned him a spot as one of only a handful of Englishmen to be honored as a Fellow of The Hymn Society in the United States and Canada and was honored by Queen Elizabeth for his services to hymnwriting shortly after his 90th birthday. This should give us all great hope that we have many years beyond retirement in which to provide meaningful service in this world!

We know we are getting worship right when God is glorified in all that we say and do and that, most emphatically, includes our music that touches us on that most visceral level. That's the power of music. And, it's one of the reasons those of us who do deal in words get so picky about the text set to the tune. I would venture to compare a well-written hymn--meaningful verse with music that an assembly can sing and remember without too much vocal training—is like a healthy, creative partnership between clergy and musicians on church staffs. Although some of you are multi-dimensional, most of us specialize and contribute one or the other, words or music, within the context of the worship we provide for the nurturance of those within the communities we serve. It IS that partnership which creates worship that speaks deeply and broadly to the souls of our people. We are called to be faithful to the leading of God's people in worship, and we are called to be faithful in working as partners—preachers and musicians, blessed with varying but intertwining gifts—in creating the experience through which God's direction and guidance are most keenly felt by all.

To that, I will add two notes. Music, because it speaks so directly to and from the soul, can be something about which we have very strong opinions and emotions. In one of my former congregations, the question, “When are we going to sing the old favorites?” was asked enough times that we decided to devote a Sunday adult forum to that question. When we actually began to NAME those favorite hymns, it became clear that there were about as many different ideas about what those favorites were as there were people in the room. It was a very helpful discussion because it opened all our eyes and ears to the

variety of music and hymnody that speak to people and made us all a little more accepting of musical variety within our worship experiences.

The second note is a word of appreciation for those of you who devote your musical talents to this specialized field of church music. There are many musicians in our world, but to be a church musician you must not only understand the church and its theology but you must be able to lead an assembly. In my first parish, I was blessed to work with a fantastically gifted director of music who was also a very fine organist. I told him he was spoiling me because he set the bar so high for everyone I would ever work with after that. A Sunday came, though, when he had to be gone unexpectedly, and a substitute was needed—quickly. There was a young woman in the congregation who was a very accomplished pianist—OK, not an organist, but piano would be fine for that Sunday and she agreed to do it. It was painful—not her playing, that was exceptional—when she was playing by herself during the prelude, postlude, or during the offertory. However, she had no idea how to LEAD people in congregational singing. She was a concert pianist, not a church musician. As a pastor in this partnership of clergy and musicians, I can say how much I appreciate the skill sets that you as church musicians bring to congregational leadership within worship and the spirit of service which that requires.

And that is where we arrive at the Philippians text which was read tonight and which is printed in your bulletin. The apostle Paul reminds us to be of the same mind, having the same love. That is our centering—as musicians and clergy—in the common ministry of providing meaningful worship of the God who gives our lives purpose, direction, hope, and peace. We are to do this not from selfish ambition but with humility, looking to the interests of others. This is our calling as **servants**. As followers in the way of Jesus

Christ, this is the core of who we are and how we are to relate to the world. And, in this life as servants following in the way of Jesus Christ, living united in the love God has for us and that we are to share with others, we lift our voices in praise and thanksgiving.

“At the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Worship provides that opportunity within community to reorient our lives, to reconnect with that which is at the core of our being, and we as church musicians and clergy facilitate this every time we prepare and lead worship. The hymnody, the liturgical responses, the word heard and the bread and wine received, all help to guide that little member that can be so unruly, that tongue that can set the forest ablaze, that deadly poison that can crush another’s spirit. As a preacher, I’m glad there’s more than the words on my tongue upon which worship rests. I’m grateful for the multi-dimensional ways that God speaks in and through our souls and the music that can speak to and reflect so deeply the feelings within our souls. To those of you who are being installed today as officers of this chapter of the American Guild of Organists, God bless and guide you in your calling. To those of you who serve together as clergy and church musician teams, may your partnership bring joy, hope, and peace to those who come to be fed in your places of worship. AMEN.

Martin Luther – “epistle of straw”

Fundamental tenet: Justification by grace through faith alone; Too much talk about being justified by works – faith without works is dead

Justification ascribed to works

Passion, resurrection, Spirit of Christ not mentioned

“he throws things together so chaotically that it seems to me he must have been some good, pious man, who took a few sayings from the disciples of the apostles and thus tossed them off on paper.”

“In a word, he wanted to guard against those who relied on faith without works, but was unequal to the task in spirit, thought, and words. He mangles the Scriptures and thereby opposes Paul and all Scripture. He tries to accomplish by harping on the law what the apostles accomplish by stimulating people to love. Therefore I cannot include him among the chief books, though I would not thereby prevent anyone from including or extolling him as he pleases, for there are otherwise many good sayings in him. Therefore I will not have him in my Bible to be numbered among the true chief books, though I would not thereby prevent anyone from including or extolling him as he pleases, for there are otherwise many good sayings in him. One man is no man in worldly things; how then, should this single man alone avail against Paul and all Scripture.”

The four books that he considered not a part of the true canon, Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation were never numbered with the other 23 books of the New Testament.
