

Psalm 98
Colossians 3: 12-17
Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church
February 12, 2012
Music Appreciation Sunday

In his warm and generous account of his Sunday walk to church published in a recent Altamont Enterprise, Frank Palmeri makes some observations about the role of music in worship which I believe resonate with many of us. He writes:

I don't know what your faith is, but when you hear good musicians playing and singing, it's hard not to imagine a higher power working through them as beautiful sounds float ethereally through the soft air of a new morning. I, for one, love good organ music; add the choir and the flutist we had that day and I was as close to heaven as you can get without actually dying.

I am sure that Frank would not mind me adding the music of the bell choir to the heavenly chorus that inspires our weekly worship!

Frank then relates an encounter with a pastor who reacted to his statement that music was so beautiful one could easily attend worship just to listen. To his attempted affirmation of music ministry the pastor retorted that one should not go to church to hear music!

I know that pastor—*I was that pastor*. There was a time when I thought that church music was simply the sound track for my important, brilliant and life transforming sermons. That anyone would be content to listen to music was an affront to my self-importance, carefully disguised as proper theology.

The older I get the more I understand and affirm what Frank says. Indeed I can tell you that it is the music of the prelude, the hymns, the preparing and singing of the anthems, the clear and rich tones of the bells, the carefully chosen music of the offertory and communion music that feeds my soul in worship. It restores me and prepares me for my spoken parts, which on a good day *might* touch a heart in some approximation of the way music does. That I do not include the postlude is due only to the fact that, due to the convention of our worship I am not present for the postlude and am getting ready to greet people. How I would rejoice if you the congregation would rise up and demand that we wait until the end of the postlude to greet one another and so allow the music to help us to make the transition from

formal worship to the worship which is living and loving God in everyday life.

Please do not hear this as false humility. The Bible teaches us that God is love and that divine love is best expressed in the harmony of all creation with one another and with the Creator. We could rewrite the first line of the book of Genesis to read, “In the beginning the God of love created harmony.” And while strict Calvinists may tell us that the rebellion of Adam and Eve completely destroyed that harmonic relationship between humanity, the creation and the Creator, experience tells us that we retain the capacity to respond to the harmony which is in fact the heart of God. Indeed we can say that the image of God in which we are created *is* the God given satellite dish which allows us to receive and respond to the divine harmony.

So can it be accidental that when we hear beautiful music rich in harmonies, carefully rehearsed and composed, that we are moved to the depths of our souls. Is not the image of God in us responding to the divine vibrations of eternal orchestral sound which at heart is God’s passionate love for God’s creation?

In Paul's letter to the Colossians we sense Paul's conviction that the harmony of all things lies at the core of Christian community.

As God's chosen ones (that is, set aside)...clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

The theme of harmony repeats through the passage like a symphonic theme:

And let the peace (that is, the harmony) of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts *sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God.*

Friends, on this Music Appreciation Sunday I invite you to be attentive not only to the sounds of music. I exhort you to attend to the chord that the music awakens in you. It is that inner experience which is the divine in you. It is the God created harmony in your soul that is responding to the eternal melody of love of which we are called to sing out to the world. Amen.