

## From the Director

### When Words Fail

I was handed this beautiful framed poster one day when I was in Twice Is Nice:

*Bach gave us God's Word  
Mozart gave us God's Laughter  
Beethoven gave us God's Fire  
GOD gave us Music  
that we might pray without words*

(from a German opera house)

It's a nice framed print and looks good on my office wall. But I don't really appreciate the sentiment! I know what is behind it, and I do celebrate the many gifts of what theologians call "common grace" - God's gifts given generously to all humanity for our pleasure, delight, and care. Music, like rain, "falls on the just and the unjust;" sometimes the unjust make better use of it. When we hear Beethoven and Mozart (for example), we hear some aspect of the image of God which even sin has not completely erased.

Now, as much as I admire the music of Bach (and my admiration grows the more I know of it, which is still not very much), as much as it conveys God's Word, as much as it weaves God's Word into the very notes and fabric of composition ... God's Word does not depend on the music of Bach (or any other composer) for its most effective communication. That's a good reminder for me as I think about, plan, prepare, rehearse, conduct and lead music in our services. None of this is required for the Word of God to be "given to us."

Having said that, of course along with you I celebrate the joining of music with the Word! I thank God that he ordained the partnership of music with His revelation. I am humbled by the reality that our congregation, led by our musicians, stands in a history of 3,000 years and more of music and song in worship, praise, prayer, proclamation, repentance, lament, etc. God is good to make something that gives such pleasure a part of his plan; our duty exercised in one of our greatest pleasures: through music to please him, become mature in him, and to be filled with His Spirit.

In the same way, I take issue with—and also understand—the last statement: "God gave us Music so that we might pray without words." No, actually he gave

us the Holy Spirit so that we might pray without words. It is in the job description of the Spirit that our groaning and uttering is translated into the right words for us to bring to the Father in prayer:

*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27)*

Here again, there is no need for music for us to pray without words.

And yet ... music *does* help us pray without words. Sometimes the music that accompanies words helps prayer become real to us, inside. We may finally "get it" when we sing (or hear it sung). In our services, one use of instrumental music is to provide time without words being spoken publicly, so that we might pray in silence. At other times the music itself really may evoke in us that sense of prayer that is without our cognitive understanding—prayer without words, which the interceding Spirit carries to the Father in accordance with God's perfect will for us. Instrumental music without textual reference (that is, "abstract music," music that does not have a tune associated with particular words) may provide a "Selah" moment (pause, reflect, consider, soak in the words you have just heard). Or non-textual music may simply be God's gift to our praying spirit at a given moment in time. In these ways, instrumental music is also the ministry of the Word.

In our year-long emphasis on "continually and earnestly seeking the Lord in prayer," let's remember that as musicians we do not always need to be providing words for prayer. Hymns may be prayers, anthems and solos may be prayers. Instrumental music with strong, clear textual associations may be prayers. And music may be both the space for prayer, the catalyst to prayer, and the gift of prayer that is only understood by the Holy Spirit but clearly and perfectly communicated through him to the Father.

Thank you for your part in leading this congregation in prayer as you both pray and ...

**Sing on!**

*Chuck*

#### Calendar Corner:

Sunday, September 16—morning services: Chancel Choir

Sunday, September 16—evening service: Sons of Korah—they sing the Psalms with an acoustic, multi-ethnic flavor

Sunday, September 23—morning services: Jubilation Bells, Chancel Choir

THE PRAYER COLUMN  
LEE HOFFNER, CHOIR CHAPLAIN

*"If your very own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend secretly entices you, saying, "Let us go and worship other gods" (gods that neither you nor your fathers have known, gods of the peoples around you, whether near or far, from one end of the land to the other), do not yield to him or listen to him. Show him no pity. Do not spare him or shield him. You must certainly put him to death. Your hand must be the first in putting him to death, and then the hands of all the people. Stone him to death, because he tried to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and no one among you will do such an evil thing again."*

--Deuteronomy 13: 6-11

Now, imagine you are a first century Jew: how can you be sure that Jesus' disciples are not enticing you to worship a false god "...that neither you nor your fathers have known..."? Those who called themselves people of God boasted to the apostles of their authority, saying, in Acts 5, 28: "Did we not straitly charge you not to teach in this name?" These people believed themselves justified and the apostles condemned.

This week, review the evidence of Jesus' divinity and of your justification by grace through faith; reconcile your faith in Jesus with the law of Moses as set down in the Deuteronomy passage.

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To include your new prayer requests, contact Chuck King (668-0878 x122; [cdking@college-church.org](mailto:cdking@college-church.org)).

**Chancel Choir Rehearsal Music:**

***Open Enrollment in the Chancel Choir through the month of September.***

Voice-Building

*Rejoice in God  
O for a Closer Walk*

Music for this Sunday, September 16  
*My Song in the Night*

***Tonight's rehearsal is short in anticipation of this weekend's retreat.***

**Choir Calendar: This Retreat weekend**  
**Friday, September 14—6:15 (registration until 9:30pm)**  
**Saturday, September 15—8:30am (registration and continental breakfast until 5pm (includes lunch))**

**Jubilation Bells Rehearsal**

***Wednesday 6:45 PM in the Choir Room***  
Bells play in services on  
Sunday, September 23

**Brass Ensemble Rehearsal**  
***Ad hoc for the Fall season***

**String Ensemble Rehearsal**  
***Organizing rehearsal Saturday, October 13, 10AM in the sanctuary***

**Concert Series**  
**College Church Sanctuary**

**October 21, 3:00 pm**  
Reception following the concert

***H. E. Singley, III***  
***College Church Organist***

***Works by:***  
***Bach, Vierne, Reger, Bruhns, Distler***