

# HYMN SING {No Scripture or Sermon}

*June 30, 2019 by Rev. Mark Brechin*

Why do we have a hymn sing? The Bible is filled with references to singing. Since the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, the people of God have gathered in songs of praise and thanksgiving to God (Exodus 15). While the judge Deborah often praised God in song (Judges 5), it was David who made music and song a central part of worshiping the LORD. Along with the various stories of David singing, a large number of Psalms are attributed to David. For the prophets, the ability to sing was often associated with the people's relationship with God. "Sing" is used 16 times in Isaiah referring to the people's joy on the day the LORD redeems them. During the times when God has removed grace because of the people's sin, however, the prophets ask "how can we sing?". After the Lord's Supper and before the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus and his disciples "sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives" (Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26). During the early days of the Church when Paul and Silas were in prison, they were said to have been "praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them." (Acts 16) For the early Church, the heart joins with the Spirit in in song and praise: "I will sing praise with the spirit" (1 Corinthians 14), "with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God" (Colossians 3), and "Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise"(James 5).

The first revival of the Roman Catholic Church was led by Pope Gregory the Great around 1000 A.D. A key aspect of this revival was the introduction of song back into worship as a way of reconnecting the heart and head in praise. Popular legend says that the music produced would later be coined "Gregorian Chant". Another popular legend is that when Martin Luther began the Protestant reformation, he would take popular beer hall songs and rewrite them with Biblical words (ex: "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"). Combating the long and often boring worship services of the Anglican church, the hymns of Charles Wesley are attributed with nearly as many conversions as his brother John's preaching. Combining Charles' poetry with John's theology, the early Methodist movement proclaimed the Gospel as much with music as with preaching. Many of Charles' hymns are still sung today for example: "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus", "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing", and "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today" During the Methodist revival of the Holiness Movement in America during the 1800s, writers like Fanny Crosby added to the songs of faith with such hymns as, "To God Be the Glory", "Blessed Assurance", and "Rescue the Perishing". Today, modern singers and songwriters continue to set biblical passages and themes to music for the next generation. Music has always been an integral part of worship. Most people remember more biblical passages because of music than Sunday School or preaching.

Why a hymn sing? Whether it is Scripture or tradition, experience or reason, there is no doubt that the music of our faith is one of the most eloquent preachers of the Good News. Types of music should not divide the faithful but unite the believing community in wonder at the many expressions of God's joy and grace in the hearts of the believer. Old or new, slow or fast, the music of our faith proclaims Jesus Christ as our risen Savior, the Holy Spirit as our gentle Comforter, and the Father as our awesome Creator. If we didn't sing, the very rocks would break out in song.