

# Singing, Music, and Psalms; Who's to Say? – *Psalm 33:1-3, Col 3:16*

*“O ‘Twas a Joyful Sound” – The Way We Worship #3*

**Introduction** – When the Reformation brought congregational singing and music back into the worship service, there was a great revival of praise and worship, singing of the psalms and the writing of new songs, which then flowed out from the church into the arts and music throughout the culture in general. Doctrine was thick, exuberance was high, and the music was skillfully and thoughtfully written from a biblical worldview. The music was also more demanding. Doctrinal decay, dirge-like singing, and modernity followed by post-modernity imposed upon the arts in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century caused much trouble in all areas of the church. Revivalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century brought about a different kind of hymnody with simpler lyrics and music that appealed quickly to the senses. In the 1960's, rock and roll took off, along with popular music styles and the ability for everyone to simply listen to music and not have to perform music. We became a people who consumed music but didn't create music. At the same time, a simple-gospel of Jesus Christ spawned a great revival throughout America and beyond, and enthusiastic, devotional, but simple worship choruses began to be written and sung. Contemporary Christian Music began. (*For a deeper dive into this, I recommend “All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes” by Ken Myers*).

That could be considered an overly simplistic summary of what happened to our worship music, but I believe it hits the high points. We are considering why we worship the way we worship at Trinity Church and this morning we will discuss our music. There is another reformation of music and singing occurring in the church today, but it is still very small compared to the modern worship experiences people can find. The question to be answered is not which do you prefer or which do I prefer, but do the Scriptures teach us what God prefers?

**Singing** (Psalm 33:1-3) - The call to rejoice is central and primary for those who have been made righteous in Christ, for even the act of our justification is to the praise of His glorious grace (Eph 1:5-6). These verses describe what that transformation produces in those whose hearts are upright before their God. Worship and praise is the overflow of a grace-filled heart. Worshipers want to praise God and they call others to join with them. Their voices are not enough and so they seek out more voices, more instruments to support them, skillful musicianship to match the object of rejoicing, and shouts of joy. *“Heartiness should be conspicuous in divine worship”* – Spurgeon. Skillfully means years of practice and a *“new song”* reflects the attitude of the heart in the work of worship. Like the *“new commandment”* which John gives (1 John 2:7-8), this praise is refreshed and refreshing. Therefore, praise should be righteous, robust, loud, fresh, and skillful – and all of these matter.

**Musical Propriety, “Goudimel,” and Wisdom** – When David played to soothe Saul's spirit, he played one kind of music (1 Sam 16:14-17) and when the prodigal returned home, the music reflected something else (Luke 15:25). Jazz in a nightclub is proper; high-classical music in the opera house works as well. Rock bands and hip-hop have their place, but how do we determine where? Musical styles must fit the occasion and our occasion here is unlike any other throughout the week (Heb 12:24-29). The point isn't to appeal to personal tastes, but to grow in wisdom, which is why the musicians appointed to serve in the temple were among the wisest men (1 Kings 4:31, 1 Chron 15:19). The music for the psalter written during the reformation was developed from historic music of the church and sought to produce styles that were unique for the church, having their own associations. In today's contemporary worship styles, it's hard to know if we're singing to our ascended King Jesus, wooing our girlfriend, partying in the streets, or joining in on some eastern-mystic-mantra.

**Our Reformation** – Psalm-singing and the styles we are using in it return us to the work of the Reformation because these men and musicians were making music with a scriptural framework in mind (theologically, aesthetically, musically). They thought in terms of tension and rest, sanctification and not sentimentality, theme and variation, unity and diversity. The point is not to stay where they were, but to recover and relearn from them, and then build upon that in an ongoing reformation of music and psalm-singing, along with writing new songs.

**Objective Standards** – *“Beauty is in the eye of the beholder”*. Is that a true statement? Well, that depends on who the beholder is. God has commanded us to worship Him “in the beauty of holiness” (1 Chron 16:29). The psalmist writes of beholding *“the beauty of the Lord”* (Psalm 27:4). We pray that beauty would rest upon us and on the work of our hands (Psalm 90:17). How do we evaluate aesthetics? If Phil 4:8 is to mean anything, God must have something in mind when He says ‘beautiful’, ‘lovely’, and ‘good’. Beauty is in the eye of the Beholder, the Triune God of scripture.

**Relative Standards** – Instead, our culture, led by the church, gave up objective aesthetic judgments long ago. While evangelicals can make a good argument against relativism in truth and ethics (yet in the last 20 years we have nearly lost our ability to do that), for over a century and a half, Christians have grown in their fear of making distinctions when it comes to beauty. This comes from romanticism, one of the many bitter fruits of the Enlightenment. Add Modern-man's pragmatism and the growing consumer mentality within the church, and it is no wonder we have caved to the demand for pop-worship styles which are easy to consume, giving us that “worshipful” feeling.

**What's Up with These Psalms?** (Col 3:16) – Exhorted to let the word of Christ dwell in us “richly” can be understood also in light of Eph 5:18-19 as being likened to intoxication of the body, our thoughts, emotions, and actions. Psalm singing moves us to be able to do those “impossible” commands of vv 5-15. In other words, this living Word dwells in us and it does something to us (Heb 4:12). Sound, wind, breath, and Spirit all seem to go together from the singing in the temple (2 Chron 5:11-15), to declaring the victory of the Lord (2 Chron 20:27-28), to the outpouring at Pentecost (Acts 2).

**What Should We Sing?** – Paul instructs us to sing “*psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs*.” This phrase has been so misunderstood by 20th and 21st Century worship leaders. In Paul's day psalms (like psalm 3), hymns (like psalm 55), and songs (like Psalm 122), was a phrase that pointed to the psalter. This is not meant to be an argument for exclusive psalmody, but for the psalter to be our bread and butter of singing, our foundational starting point. But we need to learn to write by imitation and we need to learn the balance of what God would have us sing about from His Playlist.

**Teaching and Admonishing** – As we study and sing the Psalms, we learn that our singing is not only to God, but about God to one another – and even God speaking to us. Some Psalms are strictly doctrinal or ethical (Psalm 1). Some are purely historical (Psalm 105, 106). Some are exhortations to praise (Psalm 92, 148-150). Many are war-like, battle songs (Psalm 68). This only begins a consideration of the vast breadth of the psalms.

**A Changed Mentality** – What has this been teaching us? We have learned to sing, and that we should sing, about things we may have never considered before in our overly sentimental contemporary worship. The Psalms change us, reform us, and our prayers and our manner of singing. They teach us to call out for God to rise up, to ask God simply, repeatedly, and boldly (17). They teach us to pour out our feelings before God (42, 47, 63). They teach us to pray with remembrance over God's mighty acts (78, 105, 106). They teach us to pray and sing covenantally (45). They teach us to sing with a holy silence (46, 62, 131), with a holy shout (47) and unending praise (145). They teach us to pray when we doubt (13), when we are broken (51), and when we are in despair over our enemies (137), they teach us how to sing against them (76). They teach us how to identify with Christ in His crucifixion and resurrection (22). It goes on and on, which is why Calvin called them, “*the Anatomy of All the Parts of the Soul*,” and Spurgeon called them, “*The Treasury of David*.”

**Before the Throne of God, the Throne of Grace** – “The overarching principle as we consider the issue of our musical service before God is that we are seeking to honor and glorify His name in what we sing and how we sing” – D. Wilson. We have come to Mount Zion, into heaven and before the throne of God. It is here that we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken and by grace alone we may enter – a place where we worship God acceptably with reverence and godly fear (Heb 12). We are to worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. And so, our music and our words should sound like it. Beautiful and holy, skillful, regimented, exuberant, sincere, and engaged. There is much to learn, to practice, to prepare, and to grow in.