

WHEN IN OUR MUSIC GOD IS GLORIFIED  
A SING FOR JOY HYMN FESTIVAL  
OCTOBER 2011

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*The following reflections were writing for the “Sing For Joy” Hymn Festival in October 2011. These texts were written by program host W. Bruce Benson, and may be re-used at no charge with permission. Please email [singforjoy@stolaf.edu](mailto:singforjoy@stolaf.edu) for reprint permission. Please include the following information if these are used in print:*

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THE HEART WORSHIPS  
LET ALL MORTAL FLESH (PROCESSIONAL)  
BEHOLD, GOD THE LORD, FROM ELIJAH

1. REFLECTION:

In the language of poetry,  
loud and soft are not always measured in decibels.  
Loud, for example, may be counted up in units of arrogance  
- which is always loud – or degrees of violence.  
Bullying is loud; friendship is not.  
Coercion is loud, hospitality is not.  
Hatred is loud, holiness . . . is so gentle it speaks in a still small voice.  
In that way, music, even if it is triple forte music, is not loud.  
A choir or congregation singing alleluia at full volume  
has more in common with the still small voice  
than with any screaming mob.  
In the language of poetry and the Spirit,  
all mortal flesh can keep silence . . . by singing.

LET ALL MORTAL FLESH  
WHEN IN OUR MUSIC GOD IS GLORIFIED

2. REFLECTION

When we say,  
“May God give us faith to sing always: alleluia,”  
does “always” mean, for a lifetime?  
For as long as the sun shines and the rivers flow?  
Or does it mean: in each and every circumstance of life?  
As long as we don’t become too judgmental on the matter,  
it certainly means both.  
There is no need to tell someone in deep grief  
that if only they had enough faith  
they could sing their way through the sorrow.  
But neither is there reason to banish music  
from any of life’s experiences.  
Did not Jesus sing a song that night  
when utmost evil strove against the light?  
If the song is love, faith can sing: always.  
Music brings the still small voice  
to those inner places that need it most.

SAVIOR OF THE NATIONS/ COMFORT COMFORT/PREPARE THE ROYAL HIGHWAY  
T WAS IN THE MOON  
IN A LOWLY MANGER BORN

### 3. REFLECTION

Perhaps if the Christmas story contained no hints at all, no signs, no intimations . . . of trouble to come, the church would take a little longer getting itself from Christmas to Lent.

But already in Advent we sing that the Christmas baby “down to death and hell descends,” “shares the sufferings of the weak,” and goes about “giving of himself in love.” Lent enters the stable by some backdoor and stands there with the cattle peering into the manger . . . and into the future.

And when that future comes, the gentle rhythms of sheep and shepherds breathing in the dark, a mother’s heart beating with love, give way to ominous rhythms: lashes and loud demanding crowds, trudging footsteps carrying a heavy load, hammers nailing grace to a cross, foolishly confident that it will stay there.

There is glory in this, but not on the bloody surface, only deep inside the event itself, as deep as the heart of God. Happiness is nowhere to be found in this scene; but blessedness abounds.

#### O SACRED HEAD, NOW WOUNDED

READING: LUKE 24: 13-35

#### ON EMMAUS JOURNEY

### 4. REFLECTION

There is a line – though it can be thin –  
between naïveté and wisdom.  
It is naïve to think that death is not really death.  
The grieving disciples of Jesus were not naïve.  
And it is naïve to think that hope – just because it feels good –  
is always trustworthy.  
There are false hopes; and the disciples knew it.  
But that does not mean it is wise to assume that death has the last word.  
It is not wise to think that inescapable means ultimate.  
That bit of wisdom the disciples were waiting to learn.  
And ah, did they learn it.

#### OPEN YOUR EARS, O FAITHFUL PEOPLE

### 5. REFLECTION

When in our music, God is glorified,  
do we sing alone, or does creation sing along?  
It is an old question of conscience for people of faith.  
Do I think I can glorify the creator while neglecting creation?  
Singing is not a substitute for stewardship and care.  
But in a quiet, gentle way,  
it has become one of the best defenders of stewardship the earth has.  
Ask: where is creation portrayed with more holiness  
than in the psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs of the church?  
Where, but in the Psalms, do the trees clap their hands,  
the hills and valleys sing for joy?  
Where else does creation have a voice?  
And where else are people encouraged to listen to that voice?  
  
When in our Music God is glorified,  
God’s creation rises up and sings along!

#### LORD YOUR HANDS HAVE FORMED

READING OF NOAH STORY FROM GENESIS

#### MY HOPE IS BUILT ON NOTHING LESS

### 6. REFLECTION

Poetry and music are explorers. As such, they are just-right companions of faith, for faith too, seeks what it cannot grasp; it too sets up camp in territory that is too expansive and mysterious to claim as its own; it is content just to be there; open to discovery.

Therefore, poetry, music and faith move easily from images of storms and anchors, sinking sand and solid ground, to images of shepherds, green pastures, and a table of welcome. Poetry, music and faith see no contradiction here; they are not definers, they are explorers, seeking out the contours of the love of God.

And what do they find? It is both solid rock and gentle shepherd; it supports in a raging flood, and leads one beside still waters.

It isn't that poetry, music and faith can't make up their minds about how to say what they want to say; it is that when the subject is grace, there is more than can be said in a lifetime.

So music helps faith say what words alone cannot.

**THE LORD'S MY SHEPHERD, I'LL NOT WANT  
LEAD ME, GUIDE ME  
EVERY TIME I FEEL THE SPIRIT**

#### 7. REFLECTION

If the moving of the Holy Spirit in the heart is one thing, and prayerful singing is another, it should be noted that the two are such good friends that whenever one comes out to play, the other is quick to join. The spirit doesn't always lead by stirring up a song; singing stirs up the spirit as well.

So it is that the poet can say in the next hymn, "How oft in making music we have found a new dimension in the world of sound." It isn't always renewal that makes us sing, sometimes it is singing that generates renewal. And it is not always a profound experience that moves us to worship; it can be worship that moves us to a more profound alleluia. May it always be so.

**WHEN IN OUR MUSIC GOD IS GLORIFIED**

#### 8. PRAYERS

Gracious God,  
You do not need our songs, but we need to sing;  
you do not need our prayers, but we need to pray.  
For it is in your grace that we find life,  
    it is in your love we find our true selves.  
Let that love and grace rest on this needy world tonight.  
Where the noise of war is loud, and the pain of famine is sharp,  
    wherever life is vulnerable and threatened,  
    stir up the hearts of your people to be instruments of your peace.  
Where sorrow or fear make it hard to sing, bring comfort and strength.  
Where illness and injury make songs seem false, bring healing.  
Where plain hopelessness will let no songs even begin,  
    breathe a word of love to awaken hope.  
And among us all, O God, let faith grow,  
    that we may deepen our trust in Christ's love:  
    for us, for all people, for creation –  
    a love that heals and redeems, now and forever. AMEN

**LOVE DIVINE, ALL LOVES EXCELLING  
STAY WITH US**