

January 29, 2023

Psalm 15

“Sing the Faith: Sing on Key”

To abide “*On God’s holy hill*” is a visual representation from Israel’s history meaning *to be in God’s presence*. What if we move this notion of *physical proximity* to one of *musical compatibility*? Let’s think of being on key – in harmony – with making something beautiful with and for God.

It is helpful at times to shift the Biblical image we are looking at because we get used to thinking about a phrase like, “*walk blamelessly*” in one rather one dimensional way and the phrase begins to lose its power.

This congregation loves music – and the part music plays in our worship and life of faith. We have skin in the game when we experience the power of music. So in our psalm today - which once went with music – let’s put that classic term - “walking blamelessly” – into a musical setting: “***Those who sing on key and in harmony with God.***”

Some of us just got nervous – because while we love music – we are worried it isn’t our strongest suit and do we really want to put our relationship with God on the line if we are *underconfident* in our singing? The reality is, of course, that *walk blamelessly is no better*. Anyone here who wants to claim the mantle of perfection and say we’ve never done something less than up to God’s standards?

The musical metaphor is helpful because we can – in all our frail humanity – still find ways to sing – if not perfectly – at least ***in harmony with God***.

This shifts the focus of our song from being about *qualification and measuring up* to living in ways which are *inspired by God and compliment God’s work* – which we are unable to do by ourselves.

If you think translating what we are asked to do in this Psalm *from re-statements of the commandments* about how we are to treat each other into the call for *artistic and musical living inspired by God* is somehow softening either God’s framework for living or what is required of us – you have not been paying attention to the music in your life. I was complaining in a stray conversation last week that I was told there would be no math in music theory. Daniel – yes, our Daniel - smiled and said, “There is a *fraction* at the beginning of every piece of

music – how could you think there would be no math?” Music has serious rules and limits.

The truth is, this Psalm is about ***the nature of God*** – and how we connect to God. What we do matters – we want our lives *to be in line with the love and purposes of God* – and when we do things like *slander – heap shame* on another or *do evil* to those with whom we share life – our lives will not line up with God’s life. We could say in those moments we are singing off key.

Think of your life and the choices made in musical terms – you are a musician who ***is inspired by and reaches for the way God does things***. This is helpful because no one sings or makes music perfectly all the time. And having made a mistake, we tend not so much to take it personally as **redouble efforts to find the right technique to hit the pitch**.

By contrast, when we do something wrong – and know we have failed to “walking blamelessly,” ***we often take it personally – and assume it is emblematic of a fatal personal flaw***. “You idiot!” Is harder to come back from than, “*That wasn’t quite right – let’s try that again.*” Musically thinking also encourages practice. Often, avoiding mistakes made in choices or actions was never practiced. Our choices add up over time and contribute to the music, either literally or metaphorically, of our lives.

Getting to the end of our Psalm -what are we to do with ***being told to hate***? It is a dangerous thing to hate. It is easier to start than to stop and causes poor judgement in the heat of the moment. Our music metaphor helps clarify this. We can say that hating to hit the wrong note is part of cherishing the times we hit the right one. It isn’t about hating yourself, someone else or someone else’s music. It is about ***knowing what is on pitch***. How many of you hate hearing the sound of finger nails on the blackboard? This avoidance of the bad is what we are after. **Our goal is nothing less than singing in harmony with God**. We are not to admire or emulate those whose life music clashes with the life-giving music of God. Instead, our lives are all about harmonizing with God – even if it costs us.

We have been given lives to express God given music and live in harmony with our creator. God help us – more than we ever thought possible – to sing on key.