

# *One Song, Many Voices*

Ephesians 4.4-7, 11-12

July 19, 2009

God's Song of creation gave us life in the beginning, and it continues to reverberate through the known and unknown realms of the universe. This Song alone sustains us. This Song calls to us through our pain and darkness, inviting us into the light of grace and love. And this Song entices us to add our voices to its strain, to sing with God a song of light, love, and joy.

- from *One Song, Many Voices*

## *The Reading*

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. <sup>7</sup>But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift... <sup>11</sup>The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

## *Pushing against Dead Weight*

A boy and his dad were walking along a path when they came across a large stone blocking their way. "If I use all my strength," the boy asked, "do you think I can move this rock?" "Certainly," his dad responded. "If you use all your strength, I am sure you can do it." The boy began to push the stone. He worked hard, mind you; he pushed and pushed with all his strength; but without success. "You were wrong, dad" he exclaimed in exasperation. "I can't do it!" The boy's dad placed his arm around his shoulder and replied, "No, son. You were wrong. You didn't use *all* your strength.

It occurs to me that there are times when we in the faith community feel like this young boy. We push and push trying to get things done in the church – we work hard to keep our ministry fresh and dynamic – but it feels like we are all alone and pushing against dead weight. Perhaps, like the boy, we haven't used all our strength; but if so, we don't know what more to do. Just what is this mysterious strength that could help us move the stone from our path? I

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propose that we dwell on this question for a few moments this morning, because it would be a God send to find new strength for the ministry of love. Let's begin our time with prayer.

Gracious One, open our spirits to your presence in our midst this day. Open our ears to listen for your unique Song - the Song of life, light, and joy - that hearing we may be inspired to add our voices to its strain, to sing with you the unending Song of joy that has reverberated through creation since that first day when you said, quite simply, let there be... In the name of the Christ we pray, Amen.

### *God's Song of Joy*

It is difficult to overestimate the power of words; their beauty and persuasiveness represent a boundless force for good, their hatred and violence a formidable force for ill. Words, simple words, can be the tools of creation or the weapons of destruction. The language of poetry, for example, can cause our spirits to soar, introducing us to a realm of breathtaking beauty. Again, simple words such as "I love you," or "I'm sorry" spoken with sincerity and tenderness can be creative indeed. They can bring healing and hope to the afflicted; and they can reconcile the estranged. On the other hand, words spoken in anger or hatred – vile, obscene words that need not be repeated here – can destroy lives, shatter dreams, and condemn countless individuals to loneliness and fear.

It is difficult to overestimate the power of words; nevertheless it must be said that all the words of the human vocabulary – taken collectively, bundled together into one powerful expression - pale in significance and power before the Word of creation uttered by God at the beginning of all things.

"In the beginning," the ancient Hebrew creation stories begin. That is, before there was time, or space, or light, or air; birds or fish or people; in the beginning when God alone was; God uttered a single Word that brought forth a universe of life, beauty, and joy. One could as well say that in the beginning God sang one Song, an eruption of Life too abundant to be contained, an overflowing of joy too radiant to be enjoyed by One alone. God sang one Song, the Song of creation; and its strength and beauty eclipse all others.

This Song, God's Song, gave us life in the beginning, and it continues to reverberate through the universe. Although often obscured by darkness and fear, this life giving Song of joy has time and again been recognized and celebrated. Thomas Aquinas, for example, observed

that God has put a sheen into every being in the universe, a divine, luminous ray of light. Hildegard of Bingen agreed, noting that the entire world has been embraced by the Creator's kiss. Building on the testimony of such Christian thinkers, it is easy to conclude with Matthew Fox that "in the beginning there was joy!"

In the beginning there was joy, and God's life giving Song of joy continues to reverberate through the known and unknown realms of the universe. If we listen closely – listen with our hearts – we will hear it in the voice of a child, the song of a bird, or the soothing cascade of a mountain stream. If we look with eyes that see, truly see, we will discover a world that dances joyfully to this tune; the graceful sway of a willow in the wind, or the playful patterns of falling snow.

This Song alone sustains us. This Song calls to us through our pain and darkness, inviting us into the light of grace and love. And this Song entices us to add our voices to its strain, to sing with God a Song of light and peace. There is, it is true, but one Song of joy that has its origin in God; but each of us has been invited to sing that Song with God.

### *Ministers All*

I am convinced that such a vision of God's unique Song underlying all things undergirds the discussion of the unity of the Spirit in Ephesians. The passage we shared earlier insists that there is but one body and one Spirit; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God; and one calling for us all, to minister for God with the gifts we have been given, to add our voices to God's life giving Song of joy.

One calling for us all. This is an interesting notion; for it means that we are each called to minister in God's name through the faith community. It is true that there are different gifts of ministry. Some are called to pastor; called humbly to model a spiritual life, to provide counseling and pastoral care, to lead in worship, and to teach. But ministry is not the exclusive domain of the ordained, and others are called – all Christians are called - to use their gifts in ministry.

To be perfectly honest, I must tell you that I find it impossible to distinguish between the call of a pastor and the call of a lay Christian. Lord knows I have tried; I was always told that

the call of a pastor is uniquely special, so I tried to see a difference. But I have never heard but one Song, God's Song of joy; and I have never sensed but one calling, to sing that Song with all the strength and passion, time and energy I can muster. This, I am convinced is your calling as well; to identify your unique gifts for ministry and to use them to touch the lives of others. We are all ministers of the Good News, invited by God to unite our voices in the Song of joy. What differences exist between us are based solely on the gifts we each possess. Thus, as a faith community, we are a team, and the effectiveness of our ministry depends upon each of us assuming her or his role.

We are ministers all, and if we will unite our voices in love and service to others, we will achieve a quality of ministry we never dreamed possible. If we will work as a team, each playing her or his role, we will energize our faith community and easily address our ministry needs. We will have ministers and to spare to visit those in hospital or those who are home- or institution-bound; ministers and to spare to cook lunch at the Argentine Food Kitchen or to volunteer for the Interfaith Hospitality Network. Plenty and to spare who feel the burden of justice issues in our society, and want to stand with the weak and the abused. Plenty and to spare to teach our children and lead them on a spiritual path; plenty and to spare to teach our adults, plenty and to spare for all of the avenues of ministry in our faith community. The gifts needed to make these ministries live and breathe are here. We simply need to recognize and cultivate our gifts, and use them in the ministry of this faith community.

We are all one; and we are all called to ministry. We respond to the one Song of life, but with a wide variety of gifts that we have to share with each other and with our larger community. We will have ministers and to spare when we recognize that we are all ministers in the Church, called to unite our voices in singing God's Song of joy in our community.

### *Will You Help?*

A boy and his dad were walking along a path when they came across a large stone blocking their way. "If I use all my strength, do you think I can move this rock?" the boy asked. "Certainly," his dad responded. "If you use all your strength, I am sure you can do it." The boy began to push the stone; he pushed and pushed with all his strength; but the stone didn't

budge. "You were wrong, dad" he exclaimed in exasperation. "I can't do it!" The boy's dad placed his arm around his shoulder and replied, "No, son. You were wrong. You didn't use *all* your strength; you didn't ask *me* to help you."

Together we can be about God's ministry of life, light, and love ...and I *am* asking, will you help? Will you recognize your gifts, develop those gifts, and use them to sing that unending Song of joy and goodness? If so, I invite you to join me in a prayer of consecration.

Gracious One, we open our hearts to you, we listen with our lives for your unique Song of creation; your Song of light, life, and joy. We yearn to be inspired by that Song. We long to be empowered by that Song, and we hunger to find our voices and add them to your own. Help us to find the courage of our faith, to recognize the broad diversity of our gifts, and to weave those gifts together, to bring light and life into our faith community and into the larger community around us. In the name of the Christ we pray. Amen.