

Why we sing!

(This sermon was preached in the morning services as part of our Worship, Enjoy, Explore and Belong Vision Sermon Series. The Bible readings are 1 Chronicles 16:1-13 and John 4:19-26)

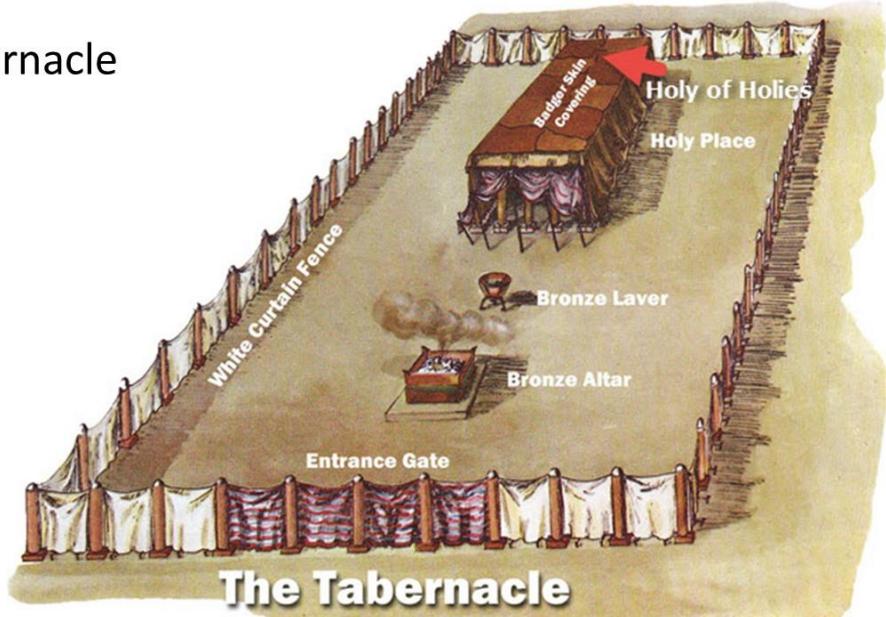


We continue our sermon series on our vision words, going through them again with a different emphasis each week. Neal opened our whole series speaking about worship, about giving everything in our lives back to God as an offering, and letting the worship of God be the lens and perspective through which everything else finds its rightful place in our lives and in our priorities.

Today we're going to think a bit about one aspect of our worship, that most of us might only do regularly *at church* - that is, to sing in praise and worship to God. We are blessed at Hull Minster to have a range of services in different traditions or styles, which we aim to do in their integrity, that invite people to connect with God in worship in a way that fits with the way God made us. I have the privilege of being part of all these expressions and it's amazing to see how different people meet with God in the different services, but we are all worshipping the same God!

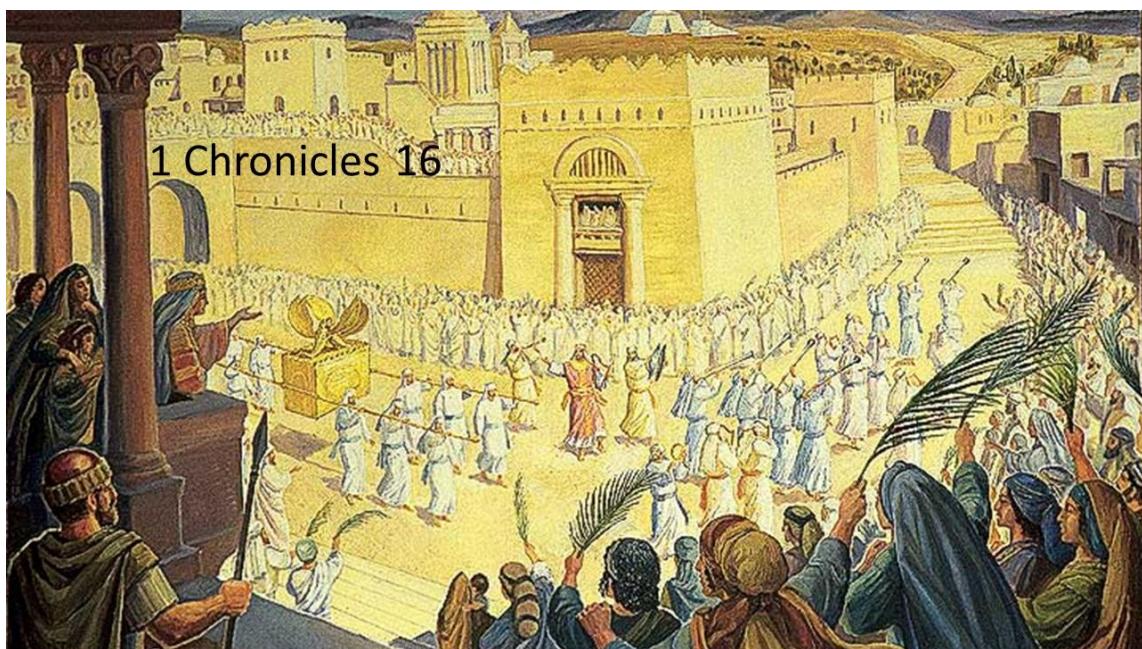
We heard in our Bible readings about the sung worship of the Israelites, and an encounter in John's gospel between the Samaritan woman at the well and Jesus. I want to talk briefly today about how music and singing have always been a part of the people of God's worshipping life, and how singing helps to shape us to be more like Jesus, sometimes whether we know it or not!

Tabernacle



1 Chronicles 16: The Ark of the covenant is the place where the glory of Yahweh, the manifestation of the presence of God, dwelt among God's people, the Israelites. Before the temple was built by King Solomon, his father, King David, built a large tent, the tabernacle, with the ark within it. The people would make sacrifices before the ark, for different things, including thanksgiving, sin offerings for forgiveness, fellowship offerings. Around this there were many, many musicians appointed to offer musical worship before the presence of God. This was the special privilege and calling of the tribe of the Levites, the priesthood of the Israelites:

⁴He appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the Lord, to extol^[a] thank, and praise the Lord, the God of Israel: ⁵Asaph was the chief, and next to him in rank were Zechariah, then Jaaziel,^[b] Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Obed-Edom and Jeiel. They were to play the lyres and harps, Asaph was to sound the cymbals,⁶ and Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests were to blow the trumpets regularly before the ark of the covenant of God. '



So along with sacrifices, there was music and singing offered in God's presence. Can you imagine the sound? There were lots of different instruments, and songs to sing, led by the musicians.

Sound familiar? As a musician I am so encouraged that the musicians were an integral part of the worshipping life of the people of God!



⁷ That day David first appointed Asaph and his associates to give praise to the Lord in this manner:

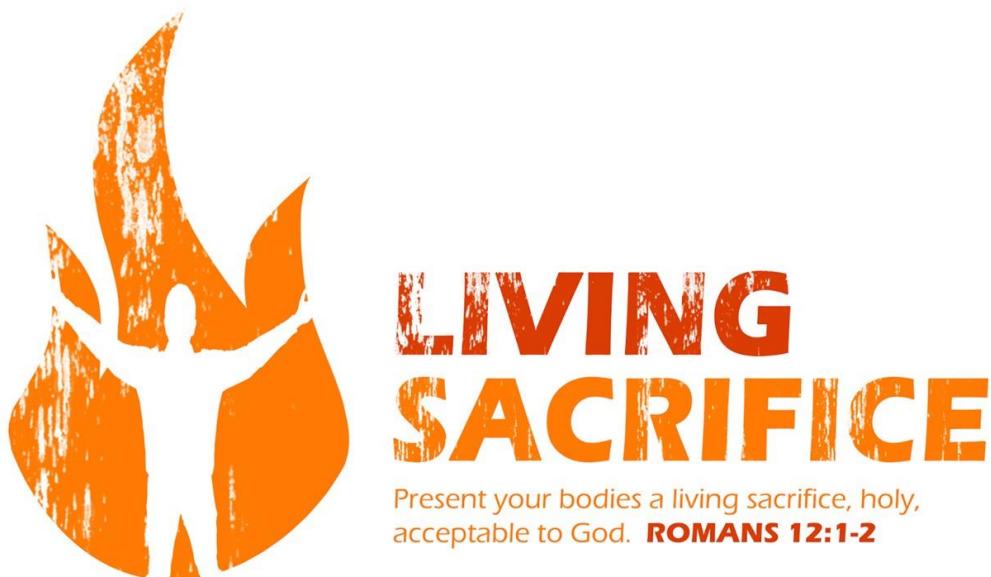
- ⁸ Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name;
make known among the nations what he has done.
⁹ Sing to him, sing praise to him;
tell of all his wonderful acts.
¹⁰ Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.
¹¹ Look to the Lord and his strength;
seek his face always.*



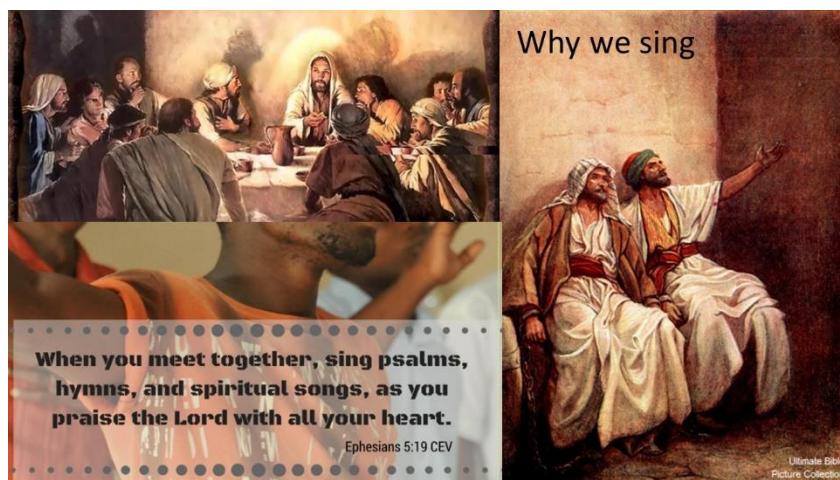
Jesus

We see in the song that is outlined, the purposes of singing are to *praise God*, to *proclaim his name*, to *let others know what God has done*, and to *remember* all he has done for his people. It is also given for our *joy*, that we rejoice as we find God and receive strength from him.

In the coming of Jesus, the music and singing continue, but the need for the type of sacrifice we see in the Old Testament has been fulfilled by Jesus - he becomes the sin offering, the scapegoat and the atoning sacrifice for each one of us.



This is why in Romans 12 St. Paul instructs the church to be a 'living sacrifice' - we no longer need to make repeated offerings for our sin, that is dealt with on the cross, but we now offer ourselves and our lives as a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for all the Jesus has done - not to earn God's love or approval, but because *he loves us!* Singing has a part in the 'renewal of our minds' which transforms us more into the likeness of Jesus.

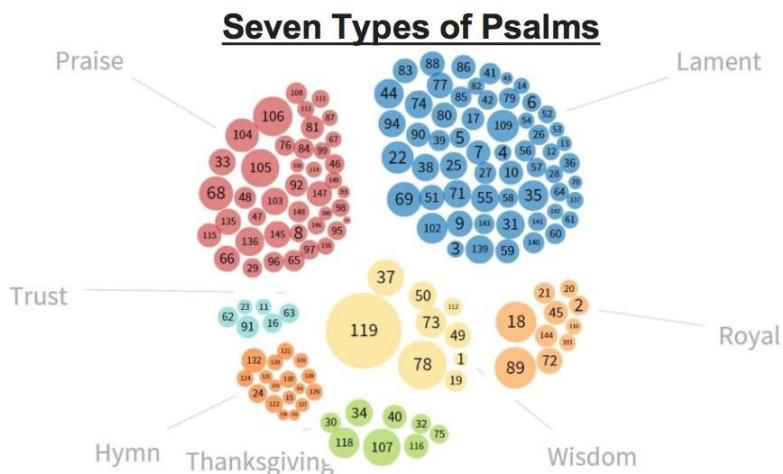


Jesus sang and worshipped his heavenly Father - according to Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26 at the end of the Last Supper, Jesus and his disciples "sang hymns and went out to the Mount of Olives." In Acts 16:25 we read that even under persecution and imprisonment, 'About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and **singing** hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.' In the New Testament church, the Levitical priesthood has been fulfilled in Jesus, so the deacons, priests/presbyters and Bishops or elders mentioned in the New Testament are called to 'equip the saints' to be the body of Christ, rather than to entirely mediate (be the go-between)

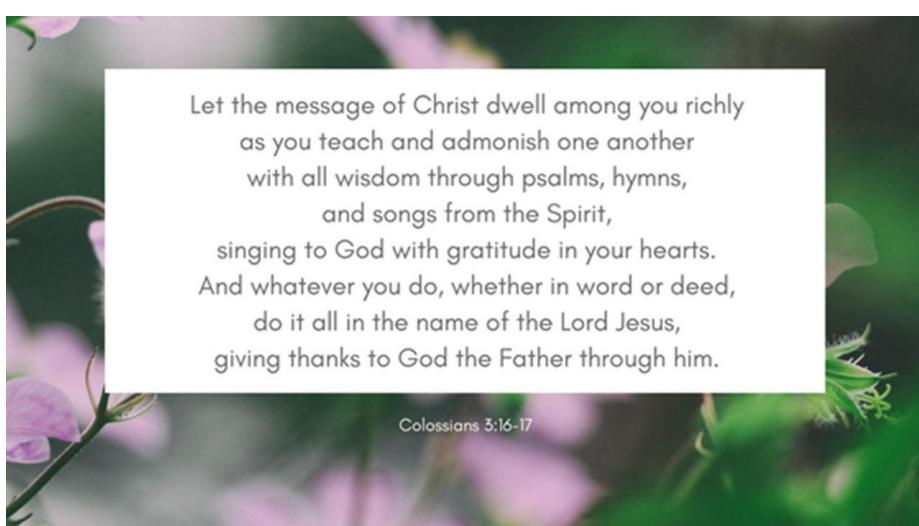
between the people of God and God's presence. But, we see in the New Testament that singing and music are still a part of the growing local churches. In Paul's letters we read:

Colossians 3:16 ¹⁶*Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.'*

Ephesians 5:18-20 ¹⁸*...be filled with the Spirit.* ¹⁹*Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord,* ²⁰*always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ....*

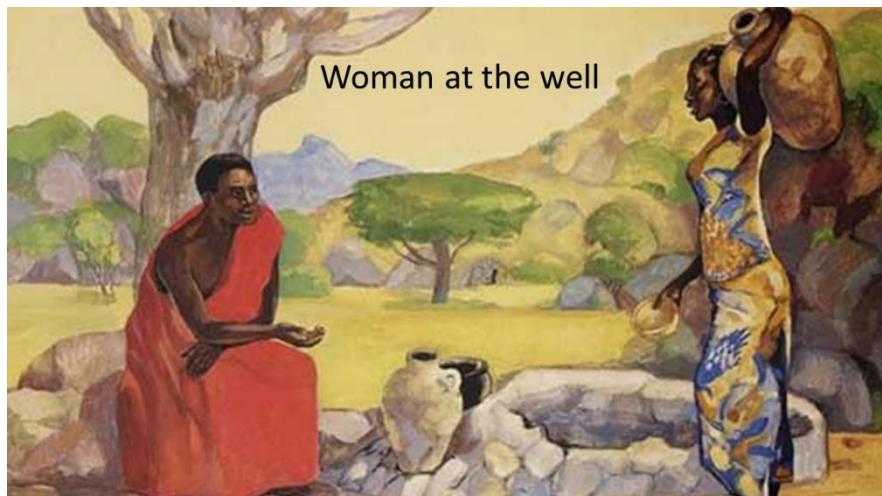


The song book of the Bible is the book of Psalms, which has inspired hymns and songs for centuries, as well as other biblical passages. There are over 60 commands to 'sing' to God in the Psalms. In James 5:13 James says 'Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise'. As well as praise, the Psalms also has over half of its songs as songs of lament - prayers of doubts, questions, anger and frustration, aimed honestly at God. Singing can help us express not only our joy but our sorrow. We can be completely honest with God in our worship.



Ancient hymns served to teach believers core beliefs like the creed, or about the person of Jesus as both God and man - singing helps us remember words sometimes much better than simply reading them. I can remember words to whole songs or choral anthems that help me remember bible passages. These passages from Paul show us that singing Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs allow the 'message of Christ' to 'dwell among us', to 'teach and admonish us' and to grow us in 'wisdom'. They encourage us to be 'filled with the spirit' and not distracted by other temptations, and to cultivate thanksgiving in our hearts. They are also communal, although singing by ourselves to God or listening to music that encourages thankfulness to God is a fantastic thing to do too.

In 1 Corinthians 14:26 Paul instructs: "When you come together, each one has a Psalm, each one has a teaching... Let all things be done for building up." Singing is for the whole body of Christ. There are some within the church gifted as musicians and singers to facilitate and lead worship (and in the psalms musicians are commanded to 'play skilfully'), but that doesn't mean that we can't all sing to God! When we sing as a congregation, God sees the heart with which we sing.



Our Gospel reading, from John 4, doesn't mention singing. But it does mention worship, worshipping God in Spirit and in Truth. *Jesus says 'Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.'*"

In this passage, the Samaritan woman has an encounter with Jesus that changes her life, and her, forever. She is met with love, forgiveness, and the offer of a new life with God, and she rushes to tell her whole village about it afterwards! There is a lot of debate among Bible scholars as to what worshipping in 'spirit and truth' means. For me, part of what it means relates to the musical worship we've been talking about. We worship in Spirit because to sing to God and worship him with music is to invite the Spirit to work in our lives, and inspire our worship. It is to worship in truth because we want to sing what's true about God, not just to remind ourselves but to tell the world about God's amazing love in Jesus. Many people encounter the presence of God, the risen Christ, in musical worship, and so we should never underestimate the encounter we are inviting when we praise God in this way. Whether it's a hymn, a choral anthem, a worship song, an

instrumental, an organ voluntary, a solo sung over others, God can use it to reveal himself to someone.

I think it's amazing that God has given us singing and music to worship him. As God our creator, God knew what he was doing. Singing is a 'whole body' activity, reminding us that we are 'whole people', body mind and spirit as one thing.



When we sing we not only renew our minds, we exercise our lungs, our diaphragm, our circulation, we tone our facial muscles, we stand up straighter, we open our breathing systems, and the body releases endorphins. Our immune system is boosted; singing aids the reduction of anxiety and anger, it increases self esteem and a sense of wellbeing, it encourages creativity, evokes emotions that we may find hard to feel otherwise, encourages community, and cultivates unity between difference.

The Gospel and the Scriptures have inspired some of the most amazing pieces of music and songs in history and been the inspiration of some of the most profound creativity every expressed. It has inspired the simplest of choruses, voices singing acapella or accompanied which have led people into God's presence.



So what's not to love about music and singing as worship to God! For some of us, it might be that most of our singing praise to God does happen in church, with others. But for some of us, who might particularly encounter God in singing and musical worship, it will be important for us to engage in this form of worship in our Monday to Saturday. Why not start your day off listening to a

hymn or song, and even sing along? Why not sing along in the car to a CD? Or find some songs, or choral music, or Taize chants that encourage you to sit and be still before God. There are also lots of Psalms set to music that you can use to worship with the Psalms. Or write your own songs! Start writing, and there are those in the church that can help with the music!

If that doesn't seem like it's for you, or you find yourself connecting to God in different ways, then please pray for the musical worship in the church - pray for Mark, our Asaph, pray for the choir, pray for the worship band musicians, and for all those who share music in this building, that we would be transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we would invite the Spirit to work, and that we would sing the truth about God.



Amen

Interested in joining Hull Minster Choir? Contact Mark Keith on music@hullminster.org

Contemporary Worship:

Bethel Church
Passion
Getty Music
Elevation Worship
Hillsong Worship
Worship Central
Housefires
Upper Room (Youtube)
IHOP
United Pursuit
Rend Collective
New Wine Worship