

March 29, 2009

Scripture: Psalm 66, Matthew 3:1-17

Sermon: "Rhythm and You"

Joyful Noises. Babies cooing. Children laughing. Orchestras. The voice of my grandmother singing the old rugged cross as she cooks in the kitchen. Our lives are full of joyful noises. In a world of iPods and MP3's we have a plethora of joyful and .... Not so joyful noises available at our fingertips. But I wonder .... When was the last time you made a joyful noise?

Joyful noises sound like all fun and games; but really are quite difficult to achieve. You see in order to create even the softest joyful peep one must first feel as if there is something worth being heard. I remember when I was in fifth grade. I had just received my first instrument, a Bach trombone. I'm not quite sure if I chose the trombone or if it chose me, but never the less we spent the better part of six years getting to know each other better. That first year of playing the trombone was the hardest. You see ... everyone wanted to play their instrument in the band. But no one wanted to play alone. And if we were having a problem with a particular part of a piece of music, well we would just stop playing, for fear of making a mistake. Our director at the time was Mrs. Ciulla, a spunky forty-something with curly brown hair and a heart of gold. Mrs. Ciulla said we didn't make mistakes, we made joyful noises; and she encouraged us to make joyful noises as often as we could. We made amazing music together from fifth grade all the way through our senior year of high school. Now I'm not going to claim that I blazed through my music fearlessly and never fearing a mistake. But Mrs. Ciulla would always lighten the mood by encouraging joyful noises.

Looking back now, that time in that fifth grade band room was a life lesson on rhythm in general. We've all experienced it, whether we've named it or not, the rhythm of life. We have our routine get up, walk the dogs, shower and eat breakfast, get the kids ready for school, head off to work. And if something should happen to mess up that rhythm; the quarter rest of an illness or the eighth note of a dead car battery, our whole day is thrown off.

About a month ago my roommate and I were worshipping at a Presbyterian church to hear a friend preach. As the service began we participated in the unison readings and quickly became tongue tied. You see, even our worship services have a certain rhythm and every congregation has a particular rhythm.

There's a theory in some circles that soon, within the next quarter century, all the musical possibilities will be used up, that everything will sound like something else, that there will be nothing unique and original anymore. Although there are many who have bought into this theory and have accepted that there is little hope for imagination and creativity in music's future there are also those who strive for creativity and a new point of view or ear as it may be.

We know them as the greats, people like Bob Marley, Cat Stevens, Tupac Shacoor, and even John the Baptist. Some would regard these and many others as prophets, both ancient and modern-day. Bob Marley, a week after being shot for speaking of peace in a time of war, stepped out into a packed house. When asked why he had come back to the stage so soon he said "The people who did this evil thing to me aren't taking a day off and neither will I". What a testimony

to a joyful noises. He made a joyful noise, one that not many agreed with and he paid dearly for it. Tupac Shakoor is quoted as saying “if God wanted me to be quiet he would’ve never showed me what he does. “ Though many opposed him and his music may not have sounded joyful he believed in what he had to say and that it needed to be heard. Another testimony to joyful noises.

And then there is John the Baptist. Good old John the Baptist. That scraggly, locust eating, Essene who had a passion for cleansing people of their sins. When we, as 21st century Christians think about Men and Women of God we mostly think about clean cut, or at least bathed people. Not some half whit who eats bugs and wears a loin cloth wading in a dirty creek cleansing people of their sins. Good old John marched to the beat of a different drum. Some might say he had his own “unique” rhythm. But one thing I can say about John is he had a passion. A passion for preaching the Gospel, proclaiming the message of Christ. John didn’t give up on his mission. I’m not sure how he did it really ... day in and day out yelling and screaming about his cousin who was the messiah when people would yell and scream and imprison him for the message he was proclaiming.. You see people listened to John and later listened to Christ because they made joyful noises and continued to make joyful noises despite opposition. They believed in what they had to say and listened to the rhythm all around them, they let the great conductor lead them and turned a deafening cacophony into a masterpiece that changed the world forever. You know, perhaps John the Baptist isn’t such a half-whit after all. Perhaps we’re the ones who haven’t a clue. We’re the ones whose silence is deafening, and whose biggest sin is fear.

Phew .... that’s quite an act to follow, Bob Marley, Tupac, John the Baptist, THE MESSIAH!!! It’s easy to get bogged down. After all ... we’re still trying to muster up the courage to make that joyful noise. But you see ... you’re already making joyful noises. But you don’t know it do you? You’re making joyful noises with every person you tell about your experience here at Defoe Christian Church. You’re making joyful noises by helping the community around you to feel and to know the love of Christ. By doing these things you are sending out a joyful noise that these people in this place worshipping this God care about the community around them. You are making joyful noises when you help out with committees and Sunday school, and Choir and simply by smiling or giving a hug to someone. You give a joyful noise with the ring of a phone to check up on someone you know is having a hard time. You burst out into joyful noise when you invite a seminary student to share your pulpit and make a joyful peep on the way to their education on the rhythm of ministry.

Listen, Can you hear it? It’s, it’s the rhythm of the Holy Spirit. Can you hear it? It’s in the heart of every believer. Can you hear it? That’s your baseline. Make a joyful noise.

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