

Summerside, Sing it Out!

(Reflections on Philippians 2:1-11, by Pastor Deven)

There is nothing like hearing a group of God's people when they gather to worship and pour out their hearts to him in song.

This is not something new. Christians have always loved to sing. From the very beginning, God's people have always participated in corporate worship through song. Israel, God's chosen people in the Old Testament, sang to God - remembering his works and reminding the people of God's incredible deliverance. Jesus, with his first disciples, continued this pattern of singing hymns of praise to God; and the early church was known for singing their hearts out to Jesus himself. Yes, Christians sing. But have you ever stopped to ask yourself why we sing?

We must admit, it is a bit of an odd thing. Yet, we continue to gather, week after week, to sing songs out loud together- just like a choir that happens to allow some terrible singers!

I grew up in a church that thought drums were of the devil – seriously. In fact, I even heard someone vehemently argue that any music in 4/4 time was satanic because it caused your body to move in sexual ways! I wish I was joking, but, sadly, it's very true. Now, God bless them. These people were trying to serve Jesus the best that they could, but this was a real issue for them.

My wife, Heather's grandmother, was a member of the Free Church of Scotland. At this church, all the women wore head coverings and they sang the Psalms out of a hymn book called "The Psalter" without any music at all.

Throughout church history, people have argued against the introduction of any and every new musical instrument or musical style that was introduced into worship. There are actually entire books and websites that have been written about and devoted to "Worship Wars".

There is much diversity and, sadly, even more division when it comes to the form, style, and sound of our worship.

So, let's be honest– we all like different kinds of music. Our iPhones and CD Players are likely filled with very different genres of music! We grew up in different generations and most generations rarely like the music of the next. We all have a different preference, and that's ok, but we need to be careful. I know some of you may feel like the music in our church is too loud or too rocky- that's okay. However, before you complain and grumble, look around and see all of the young families that God is bringing here! Kids, just like your grandkids, are being reached with the gospel of Jesus! You can and must praise God for this, even if you don't love the music.

But here's the thing, we're not pragmatic. We don't simply do the songs we do because they are cool or because they help us grow in numbers. We choose to sing them in order to worship Jesus. That's why Luke picks the songs that we sing each week. That's why he and I talk through our song choices, the sound of our music, and even its volume. Don't complain to Luke when you don't like his music choices - you can come and talk to me if there is an issue.

But, to be frank, we are not here to cater to you – if we did that, we’d end up with a church filled with people who are just like you. Is that really what you want? One of the things that I love about us, at Summerside, is our diversity and differences. You may have a different preference in music, but we’re not united around a preference. We are united around Jesus and the incredible life-changing message of the gospel.

Put very simply, worship is giving God his due; giving God the recognition that he deserves. You can worship in countless ways. Don’t think of it as only music. Yes, you can sing, but you can also worship God in your obedience, your service, and even in your giving. For example, when the offering plate is passed around here each Sunday, this too provides you with an opportunity to worship God. In giving a portion of your finances to him, you are not simply supporting the work of this church, but you are giving to further his kingdom and expand the praise of his name. This act of worship involves a trust in God’s faithfulness, acknowledging him as your provider and the giver of all that you have. You see, worship is a lifestyle, not simply a song set.

In the book of Philippians, chapter 2, we find what is possibly the oldest Christian hymn. More than likely, the early church, in the years before the Gospels (The New Testament) were written, the message and good news of Jesus had spread by eye witness accounts. The church went out and shared what they had both seen and experienced personally. There was power, not in their opinions, but in the message of the gospel! And, just like we do, they gathered together, had church services, liturgies, and symbols that they used in their own times of worship. As a church, their worship also involved singing songs about and to Jesus. What we see here in Philippians is Paul, the writer and apostle, incorporating a hymn which the early church likely had written and sung to Jesus.

I encourage you to look at the text yourself - get your Bibles open and follow along. I will summarize verses 1-5 because the hymn starts in verse six.

Verses one to five tell us that we are one in Christ - united together as his people. The implication of this is that we are to act like it. As God’s people, we are to love one another, be selfless, and live together as new creations in Christ. Paul always does this as he writes - he tells us how we are to live as God’s people and he always points us back to Jesus. For it is Jesus alone who provides us with both a model to follow and who makes it possible for us to obey, forgiving us even when we don’t. You cannot grow in your faith as a Christian without Jesus!

Now, let’s take a look at the hymn itself, contained in verses 6-11. Remember, Christians in the early church sang, and so do we! Here are six reasons contained within this early church hymn that show us clearly the reasons why:

Christians sing because:

1. **Jesus Is God (vs. 6)**: *“Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.”*

Christians sing because Jesus is God. We don't sing because he was a good teacher or because he was enlightened or because he left us a great example to follow. We sing because he is fully and wholly God. Only God himself is worthy to be worshipped. Only God deserves our praises. Jesus is God come down in the flesh. The God we read about in the Old Testament is Jesus. Jesus is the creator God of all things. He is not a created being, he is the Creator.

What does this mean for us? We sing theology. This truth shows us the importance of singing songs that are rich in doctrine and remind us of the fact that Jesus is God. We're careful about the songs we sing here at Summerside. They must contain truth, not just sound nice. Here's the thing, though, it's not only an issue with modern songs; some older songs are brutal as well. We care much more about the theology of a song than the sound or style of the music. So, Summerside: Be thankful for a church that reflects deeply on the songs that we sing. We don't look up the top 20 Christian songs and automatically sing them. We are careful with our song selection- because we want to sing truth.

Christians sing because Jesus is God. So, Summerside – SING IT OUT!

2. **Jesus Came Down (vs.7)**: *“Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness”*

In Jesus, God came down. I want you to look at the text – he came down! This transcendent God that we sing about; this God who created all things; who spoke the universe into existence; who is worshipped by angels; who is eternal - this God came down here to live as one of us! The incarnation – God becoming man – is a beautiful act of service. The highest came down low.

What does this mean for us? We sing about God's transcendence and his nearness. Sometimes, songs make it seem as if Jesus is your boyfriend or girlfriend. Some songs use lame, vague language and soft words about love; and, more often than not, there are songs that talk all about God's love for us. It's true that God loves you, but God does not love you because you are wonderful. He loves you, despite your sin, stain and brokenness - not because YOU are worthy, but because HE is love! So, we sing about Jesus' glory, his power, his authority, and his transcendence. We sing with deep respect and gravity. We are singing to the glorious God who chose to come down. We sing songs both about his glory and songs about his nearness, gentleness, and grace. So, Summerside: Lift your voice when we sing about God's glory – about his majesty. Lift your voice when we sing about his nearness and his grace.

Christians sing because Jesus came down. So, Summerside – SING IT OUT!

3. **Jesus Came to Serve (vs. 7)**: *“rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant being made in human likeness.”*

We sing because the glorious God that is a consuming fire came down - not to crush and shame, but to serve. We see this over and over in the gospels. Jesus said it himself, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom

for many”.

If you don't know anything about Jesus yet, know that, although he is holy and to be feared, he is gentle and humble in spirit. He says to the tired: come and find rest. He says to the rejected: come and find a home. He says to the evil: come and be cleansed. He says to the broken: come and be healed. He says to the fearful: come and find peace. He is a servant – a king who serves. How incredible is that?

What does this mean for us? We sing to be encouraged. Life is hard. You may be struggling. Maybe you are facing sickness, uncertainty, fear, or brokenness. When we sing, we are reminding one another, and reminding our own hearts, that Jesus is a gentle savior; that he is a servant; that he stoops to wash the feet of sinners like you and me. So, Summerside, lift your voice and sing so that those around you, those who, perhaps today, are struggling to sing themselves, hear and are reminded of God's faithfulness, gentle spirit, compassion and servanthood. Sing it out! There are going to be days that I need to hear you proclaiming, in song, the hope we have in Jesus – reminding me of the truths that are so easy to forget.

Christians sing because Jesus came to serve. So, Summerside – SING IT OUT!

4. **Jesus Came to Die (vs. 8):** *“And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!”*

We sing because Jesus died. It's a bit odd, but Christians have always sung joyfully about the death of their king. Why? Because his death is the means by which we are forgiven. Perfect, sinless, beautiful Jesus was crucified on a Roman Cross. He died - as part of God's plan. He died - not for his own sin, he was sinless – he died as our substitute. He obeyed God in all things and died in our place. All who trust in him can be saved, forgiven, healed, welcomed. What news!

What does this mean for us? We sing about blood and death. Don't go to a church or read books or follow bloggers that can't talk about Jesus' blood and death. The biblical writers didn't back down from speaking about this and neither will we. In Galatians 6:14 it says – “May I never boast in anything save the cross of Christ ...”

Summerside, lift your voice and sing, boasting only in the blood and death of our perfect savior and sacrifice, Jesus.

Christians sing about the blood and death of Jesus because it's our salvation and hope. So, Summerside – SING IT OUT!

5. **Jesus Is Exalted (vs. 9):** *“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,”*

Christians sing because our Savior is alive. We sing to him and no one else. He is raised and exalted to the highest place. He may have come as a servant, but he won the victory as God's chosen king. He now sits at the Father's right hand in glory awaiting the day when he places all things under his feet! Ephesians 1:22 says: “And God placed all things under his feet and

appointed him to be head over everything for the church,”

What does this mean for us? We sing with joy! We aren't singing to a defeated king whose body is in the grave. We sing to our resurrected king. We sing to the one who defeated death. We sing to the one whom the grave could not hold – to the one who is victorious over all. This is why we turn it up and why we sing it out! So, Summerside, lift your voice loud and together declare that He is risen!

Christians sing because Jesus is alive. So, Summerside – SING IT OUT!

6. **Jesus Is Lord (vs.9):** *“that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

Christians sing this fundamental truth - Jesus is Lord. This is the foundation of living a life of joy, of honoring God, and of being all that God has called you to be – Jesus is Lord. It has been, and continues to be, the central confession of Christianity. “Lord” means: master, king, ruler. In the time that Paul was writing, Caesar was viewed as Lord. He was the one to be obeyed; the one to be lived for, the one who brought justice and peace, the one who won victory for his people. When Christians came along, they adamantly declared the fact that Jesus, the Messiah, alone was “Lord”. Jesus, said the early Christians, was the one to be obeyed, the one who brought justice and peace, the one who won victory for his people. As Christians, he is the one we live for. He is the one whose word is law. He is the one we follow. Jesus is Lord! Jesus himself nailed it, saying: “You cannot serve two masters...”. To be a Christian is to recognize Jesus as Lord. He suffers no rivals.

Again, what this means for us Summerside is that when we sing, we sing out our allegiance to King Jesus - the only Lord. The one who is God. The one who came down. The one who came to serve. The one who came to die. The one who is raised to life and exalted to the highest place - the one and only Lord. We sing to remind one another that not our pleasure, our reputation, our looks, our careers, our sexuality, our influence, neither our Prime Minister or any President - is Lord. There is only one Lord – and it's Jesus! There is only one King – and it's Jesus! There is only one master – it is Jesus alone! This is why we sing. So, Summerside, lift your voice, as one body, declaring that Jesus alone is our Lord.

Christians sing as a pledge of our allegiance to our king - Jesus. So, Summerside – SING IT OUT!

Finally, let me offer a few thoughts on how we can practically work some of these things out:

- a) Be thankful for the worship band and leadership that God has provided for us here at Summerside.
- b) Focus our minds and hearts on the words we sing week after week. Push yourself to focus and respond to the truth and beauty of what you are singing (you wouldn't allow your heart and mind to review a shopping list on your wedding day!)
- c) We must take our worship - in singing – seriously. If you are sitting in the foyer, stand up - be engaged! You are not here to watch worship, you're here to worship.

- d) Arrive early enough so we have time to get ourselves seated and sit under the call to worship without being frazzled and unnecessarily distracted.
- e) We must sing it out like he deserves it - because he does! He and he alone is deserving of our worship.

Summerside, our God is worth it! Jesus deserves our praise! Sing it out! Christians sing because:

Jesus is God

Jesus came down

Jesus came to serve

Jesus came to die

Jesus is exalted

Jesus is Lord

... So, Summerside, lift your voices and – **SING IT OUT!**