

Music is the language of worship
Psalm 150
1 Corinthians 14:6-12
Mike Magee
Brentwood First Presbyterian
9/21/08

Scene 1 Singing is praying twice

Do you think IQ tests provide the best indication of intelligence? You may be surprised to know that some teachers don't think so.

As a matter of fact, Dr. Howard Gardner of Harvard University proposes that people are much more complex than standard testing suggests. He argues that traditional intelligence tests favor verbal and mathematical people, but that some people have different strengths not measured by IQ tests.

The Multiple intelligences educational theory describes an array of different kinds of "intelligences" exhibited by human beings. Gardner suggests that each individual manifests varying levels of these different intelligences, and thus each person has a unique "cognitive profile."

The intelligence types Gardner describes are

Word smart, Number smart, and Picture smart.

Analytically smart, Nature smart, and People smart.

Body smart, Music smart, and Spiritually smart.

Lets talk about some of these intelligences.

Lets talk about body intelligence. Most of you don't know this, but I had a short football career 45 years ago. Our coach was a high school kid paid by the YMCA. He coached Stanford elementary school's football team, of which I was a team member. There were no tryouts. Everyone whose parents paid the fee got to practice, dress out, and play. But I think I was the worst player on the team. I could not run fast, I could not throw or catch a football, and could not tackle well. I think my main contribution to the team was as the nerdy mascot. But the high school kid who was the coach, Steve Flohr, was very indulgent toward me.

15 years later, he was the chief surgery resident in Memphis, taking call from home, and I was the first year intern on call at the hospital. I thought I diagnosed appendicitis in a young lady at 12 MN, and called him to come in to operate. He

asked me if I realized that my call was making him get out of bed, and that he would have to call the chief of the department of surgery also to come in, and was I sure about my diagnosis. I told him I thought so. Once again, he was very indulgent toward me. He finally told me at 2AM after he removed the appendix, that I was right, that our patient did have appendicitis. My former football coach told me that if only I had any neurons connecting my hands and feet with my brain I might make a good surgeon. Needless to say, I did not even apply to a surgery program. I have never been coordinated enough to excel at sports or surgery. Debbie can tell you that I have no rhythm when we dance, that I dance to my own beat. And I trip over my own feet all the time. When it comes to body intelligence, I am definitely not gifted. Some of you who are or were good in sports might have a body intelligence quotient of over 180. I think my body intelligence quotient, my BQ, is probably about 70. But I enjoy dancing with Debbie, so my low BQ does not keep me from trying.

Now lets talk about music intelligence. You and I listened to Psalm 150, and the Corinthians reading today, so we know the importance and value of music in worship both in both Old and New Testament times. We also know its importance today. In worship, music is not entertainment for us. It is entertainment for God. With music, we glorify not ourselves, but God. But it also brings us together onto one page.

When Ray plays these chords, note not just the notes, but also how hard or soft, and how firm or tentative the keys are touched.

Ray, may I ask you to hit a discordant chord, and now, will you play a harmonic chord?

Now, may I ask you to play a chord that is soft, somber, and reflective, and now, play one that is chirpy, cheerful, and upbeat?

A chord that provokes fear, and now one that is gentle but firm and confident?

A chord that mirrors anger, and now, one that is forgiving?

A chord that is cold and distant, and now one that is warm and near at hand?

To try something different, I tried singing as the opening and closing to one of my sermons in divinity school. My professor told me he appreciated the effort, but until I learned how to sing, to try another way to open and close a sermon. One of my friends who went with me on a mission trip to Guatemala a few years ago, told me she gives me an A for effort for my enthusiastic singing, but would not tell me what grade she would give me for my ability to sing. She did not say so, but I have been told by others that I usually sing flat. I think it is safe to say that when it comes to musical intelligence, I am somewhat less than gifted.

David Toledo, today's praise band director, Ray, Kathy, Karen, Alice, and all the kids and adults singing and playing music today probably have musical intelligence quotients that top the charts over 180. On the other hand, I think my musical intelligence quotient, my MQ, is about 40.

But you do not have to have an MQ of over 180 to sing God's praises. Even the musically challenged can do that. We can all make a joyful noise to the Lord. And we should.

Because singing and speaking use different parts of the brain. Augustine of Hippo was a bishop in north Africa 1700 years ago. I believe his most famous contribution to worship is what he wrote about music. He said, "Singing is praying twice." It has been said that Mathematics is the language of accounting and science. And that Metaphor and symbol are the language of theology. But I submit to you that rhythm and pitch are the language of worship. We sing our lives to God.

But we have a tendency to prefer only one genre of worship music: traditional, gospel, or praise music.

Scene 2 Speaking in tongues

Several churches have as their early service a praise band like what you are hearing today, and have as their late service traditional hymns. The attendees of the early service say they fall asleep with the late service hymns, and the attendees of the late service cannot stand the drums, saying they are not real music. They only like the hymns written 500 years ago.

Martin Luther's hymns from 500 years ago were not appreciated then because they were a new style of music. Instead of scripture being chanted in Latin, his music took the form of lyrics that he wrote, and set to popular tunes he heard in beer taverns. A Mighty Fortress is one example of this.

And regarding percussion instruments like drums, I refer you to the pictures of percussion instruments from ancient Israel on the front of the bulletin, and a discussion about percussion instruments on the last page of the bulletin.

I submit that to each genre of music lover, other genres are like speaking in tongues to them. Like those folk described in 1 Corinthians 14, if they do not get to hear the genre of music they like, it is as if they are hearing incoherent sounds, and they quit listening. Or worse, stay home if the only genre offered is one they do not like.

The latest trend is therefore to incorporate all three genres of music: praise music, gospel music, and traditional hymns. Worship music is blended so all

those who attend have their heart strings plucked, no matter what their favorite genre.

The flute and kinnor are mentioned in the Bible as early as the fourth chapter of Genesis. And the book of Psalms is the hymnal of the ancient Hebrews. If you look through it you will see notes written to music directors at the beginning of many of the Psalms. The "chief musician" occurs in the titles of 54 of the 150 Psalms. Asaph and his brothers were apparently the first to hold this position. The book of Chronicles in the Old Testament tells us that by the time that King David began to crystallize plans for the building of the Great Temple, he also developed a class of professional liturgical singers. He organized 4,000 sacred singers into 24 classes, all assigned within the ranks of the Levites. But someone had to teach apprentice singers their craft, and again this was a job of the Levites, a job that we can compare to modern day music teachers and church music directors. With one difference that all church musicians will appreciate. The Levites were so highly regarded they were tax exempt and lived free in special villages built around Jerusalem.

Do we want to keep the folks in my age demographic and older happy? Then we keep the traditional and gospel hymns. Do we want children, teenagers, college kids, and parents of young children involved? Then we also sing praise music, and we hire a praise band director. But that costs money.

Scene 3 We build community with rhythm and pitch

A children's music teacher organized a band in her school. The principal was so proud of the music teacher's efforts that without consulting her he decided that the band should give a concert for the entire school. The music teacher wasn't so sure her young musicians were ready to give a concert, so she tried to talk the principal out of holding the concert, to no avail. Just before the concert was ready to begin, as the music teacher stood on the podium, she leaned forward and whispered to her nervous musicians, "If you're not sure of your part, just pretend to play." And with that, she stepped back, lifted her baton and with a great flourish brought it down. Lo and behold, nothing happened! The band brought forth a resounding silence.

Sometimes we in the church are like that children's band, unsure of our parts, tentative in our roles, reluctant to trumpet forth the music of faith that God desires of us. And are reluctant to work together in the spirit of community. We prefer working by ourselves or not at all, instead of working with each other. Because we live in a culture that promotes rugged individualism. A culture of me myself and I.

Two mischievous school brothers stole a little girl's ruler. The nun who was the teacher admonished the whole class about the 8th commandment, and concluded by asking what would Jesus do, and where is Jesus? Over supper that night, the

two brothers were sad. Their mother asked them why, and they blurted out, the nun lost her Jesus, and thinks we stole him! Death, humiliation, and sickness are like those mischievous brothers. They cause us to lose our Jesus.

A man stopped going to church after his wife died. He told his visiting pastor that he just did not see the need for church. He said he was spiritual but not religious, and it was a struggle to get up on Sunday mornings anymore. It was a cold night, and he had a wood fire in his fire place. The pastor said nothing, but took the poker, and separated one of the coals from the bed of flaming coals. It burned for a few minutes, and then turned black. The other coals were still burning hot. The man told the pastor, "I get it." We are created to be in community with other human beings. And I don't mean just to go fishing or play golf or go out to eat. We are meant to be in community to lift up someone greater than ourselves, and to talk about the why questions with each other. Einstein said science can answer the how questions. But he said only discussion within communities of faith can answer the why questions. It has been said that the only folks who do not need community are those so called self made men and women who think they themselves will never encounter adversity, or if they do, they can bring themselves up by their own boot straps. But what if they loose their boots? It has been said that it takes a community to raise a child. It also takes a community to rise up out of humiliation, to recover from the lost of a loved one, or to feel comforted when we are sick. It takes a community to find those boots you have lost. It takes a community to find our Jesus.

Spiritual intelligence is that intelligence that makes us whole, and that gives us our integrity. It is the intelligence with which we ask fundamental questions and with which we reframe our answers.

We sing of spiritual intelligence in the hymnody of the church. And we bring our divergent voices together into one body, one voice. Singing a hymn is a form of corporate confession of faith, but it is more than that. It is also a corporate confession of emotion. A corporate confession of striving for wholeness within a community of faith.

Debbie and I went to Nashville's symphony orchestra last week. The musicians sat and stood about, strumming on strings, blowing into horns, beating on drums. There was a lot of noise, but no music. Then the conductor entered. He walked to his podium and stepped upon it. His eye swept the scene before him - all the musicians and all their instruments. He lifted his baton, and paused there for a moment. Then he gave the downbeat. Instantly there was music, all instruments blending into one harmonious whole.

Our human spirits are a lot like symphony orchestras. Within us there may be discordant elements, warring factions that pull this way or that, and we are out of focus, out of tune - we are just not together. As an orchestra needs a maestro, so do we. We find that maestro, that conductor, in God.

We are at worship now. We turn the whole focus of our attention to our God. Acknowledging that God is in command, we yield all our instruments to a higher power.

Each of us do this. And within each of us a kind of music is made, the kind which can be produced only in the human spirit, the kind that, even there, only the Master can make.

Conclusion

We sing and pray together not as flowers all of the same color, trumpeting our blooms all at the same time for a few weeks, and then withering away. We do sing and pray together, but not just with people whose music tastes are just like ours, because this is not sustainable. More wholesome than a flower bed with all the same genre of flowers and colors, is the flower bed that blooms in colors which stimulate all parts of our visual cortex, and which blooms all year with blue pansies, red Lenten roses, and yellow February Gold. We sing and pray together, rejoicing in our diversity, experiencing God's call to create a diverse musical community where not every one has the same tastes in music. A spiritual community built on diversity of rhythm and pitch.

Glory be to God, Hallelujah, and all God's people say ...