

Make a Joyful Noise!

Do you remember Big Beak? He was the big, yellow, fluffy, sharp-voiced bird who appeared in the church's Feast entertainment films back in the eighties. I vividly remember his comical, off-key rendition of "Sing," a song originally recorded and made famous by the Carpenters:

**Sing – sing a song;
Sing out loud; sing out strong...
Sing of good things, not bad.
Sing of happy, not sad...**

**Don't worry that it's not good enough for anyone else to hear.
Just sing – sing a song. ©**

Despite the humorous shortcomings of Big Beak's version, there is quite a significant message for members of God's church in the words of this song. As we approach the beginning of another Holy Day season, I would like to stir you to action – to urge you to put your whole hearts into your hymn singing. Let us go through some of the words of the song again and examine them, line by line:

Sing!

The Bible agrees with this encouragement from Big Beak and the Carpenters for God's people to sing. God's Word has a lot to say about singing. But *what* should we sing?

Sing a song!

A song? Of course! What else can you sing but a song? But what *kinds* of songs does God want His people to sing – specifically in church services? There are lots of musical styles available today, some of which we should stay well away from. Here's what God tells us through the apostle Paul:

Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart. (Ephesians 5:19 RSV)

God wants us to sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. The words "addressing one another" in the above scripture indicate that, like all offerings, the singing of hymns benefits the givers as well as being pleasant gifts to the One who receives them.

Our English dictionaries tell us that a hymn is a song of praise, adoration or thanksgiving. The English word "hymn" comes from the Greek word *humnos* which is a song or an ode and which originated with the older Greek word *hudeo* which aptly means, "to celebrate."

The word "psalm" comes from the Greek word *psalmos*, which means to strike or twang a harp. The Old Testament Hebrew uses four very similar words for "psalm": *mizmowr*, *zimrah*, *zamar* and *zamiyr*. These words can mean melody, psalm, psalmist, music, song, sing, singing, sing praise, make music, and play a musical instrument. A psalm, then, is just a song which is usually accompanied by one or more musical instruments.

Most of the hymns we use in weekly Sabbath services are taken from the Bible's book of Psalms. It is an interesting fact that the Bible's Psalms were not all written by David. Some were written by Moses, some by a high ranking Levite and temple musician by the name of Asaph, and some by other writers. Selected psalms were set to modern, inspiring tunes and compiled into *The Bible Hymnal* by Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong's late brother, Dwight. Other hymns (for example *Onward Christian Soldiers*, *America the Beautiful*, and *God Speaks to Us*) were carefully chosen from the world's vast repertoire and added to the hymnal with the primary criterion that their lyrics had to strictly agree with God's Word in the Bible!

Sing out loud!

Are we really singing out loud at weekly Sabbath services? Are we singing twice as loud on God's Holy Days? Are **you**? Here is a song-leader's-eye-view of how some hymn singers look to him...



Does THIS kind of hymn singing look like praise, adoration and thanksgiving to you? What do God's people have to be ashamed of? Why should we hang our heads during the hymn-singing portion of the service? God knows we don't all have good voices – so He tells us in Psalm 95:1 to "make a joyful noise," then He repeats it for emphasis in verse 2. Let us read these verses in full:

O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms.

I remember singing in a local church choir some years ago with a man whose voice was far from great. He was chosen as a choir member, not for his voice, but for his wonderful, infectious enthusiasm and for his glad and willing obedience to God's command in Psalm 95.

Sing out strong!

But isn't hymn singing just for wimps, sissies and weaklings?

Let me make a plain statement here: There are no wimps, sissies or weaklings in God's true church! Also, the hymns in our Bible Hymnal are not wimpy, over-emotional hymns. These songs are written *for* brave men, women and children; and were written *by* brave men such as David, a king in training, who, during the same period as that in which he wrote some of his psalms (when just a boy), did battle with a lion, a bear and a literal giant!

Why should we sing out strong? We find out by continuing in verse 3 of Psalm 95:

For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

Yes, the Eternal is the great God! The great King! The Bible is replete with many other reasons why we should sing out strongly and fearlessly to our God.

Sing of good things, not bad!

We should think about the words of the hymns while we are singing them. They are inspiring, encouraging and strengthening words. Hymn singing was one of the last things Jesus did before He went out to face His agony, torture and death:

Mark 14:26 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Although we don't know the words of the hymn that He and His disciples sang, we can be sure that it was one that gave Him and His disciples additional courage and vision.

Paul and Silas sang hymns when they were in a Philippi prison:

And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. (Acts 16:23-25)

They weren't just nervously humming or "whistling a happy tune" because they were afraid. Like Jesus as He faced His trial, they too needed inspiration, courage and vision. In addition to the fact that Paul and Silas faced the possibility of execution, their jail was not a pleasant place to be. Many of today's western prisons are like luxury hotels in comparison to the Macedonian dungeon where Paul and Silas were incarcerated.

So when we are singing the hymns to God we should think about and sincerely mean the words that are coming out of our mouths. Otherwise they are no better than vain repetitions which Jesus condemns.

And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. (Matthew 6:7)

Sing of happy, not sad!

Again, God's Word agrees with this concept of singing about happy things. Let us look at James 5:13:

Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms.

God, through James, is telling us here that (to borrow some lyrics from another children's song): "If we're happy and we know it" we are to sing. Yes, to sing psalms and hymns of praise and thanksgiving to God. The words to virtually all of the hymns in our Bible Hymnal look forward to the Kingdom of God. What could be happier? Isn't the wonderful World Tomorrow worth singing out for?

Before the Reformation, only the Roman Catholic priests and choir were permitted to sing at their church services, and then only in a dirge-like "plain-chant." God's people today should be happy and very thankful that we enjoy the liberty to be able to join in and sing these hymns that have such fine, inspiring words and melodies.

Don't worry that it's not good enough for anyone else to hear!

God knows each of His children personally and individually. He knows and understands very well that He has not blessed every one of us with magnificent singing voices like those possessed by Kiri Te Kanawa and Luciano Pavarotti. We should remember God's double command, quoted above, for His people to "make a joyful noise." We should be less concerned with what other human beings think of our singing and more concerned about what God thinks! As with "special music," our weekly hymn singing is a form of offering to God. In the Old Testament times of tabernacle and temple worship, hymn singing as an integral part of the offering ceremonies. If our hymn singing is an offering, what then is the quality of our offering? Is it like Abel's? Or is it like Cain's? (See Genesis 4:3-7; Hebrews 11:4; I John 3:12) Once again, God is more interested in the attitude and effort that is put into our offerings than in our "natural" talent or ability to give them:

Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood." (Mark 12:42-44)

Make a joyful noise!

The Church of God - Canada

Don't be troubled if the person in front of you turns around and looks at you when you're "singing out loud." You never know, your gusto might be inspiring to that person. And remember, we're all in God's church. We all should be singing to Him with all of our hearts.



There! Now that's much better, isn't it?!

Just sing, sing a song!

God is with us in church services. We ought to be inspired to sing out – inspired by God's presence, inspired by the words of the hymns, inspired by their melodies, and inspired by the blessing of our togetherness with our brethren. Throughout the upcoming Feast days and at every church service throughout the coming year – let us put our whole heart into our hymn singing.

Raise the chorus! Make a joyful noise!

SING!



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John Plunkett

Building Bridges, The Church of God - Canada

Qualicum Beach, British Columbia, Canada