

Just Keep Singing!

Is there something that you just can't live without? Something that, if it was taken away, would make your life fundamentally different and probably less enjoyable? There are lots of different things that could be classed as essential to different people, a fact that has become somewhat of a minefield for shops during lockdown as they work out if their stock is essential and whether that means they can open or not. For some, it might be a gadget, a phone or tablet that keeps them connected and up to date with the world and what they have to do today. For others, it could be a cherished possession or photo that recalls loved ones or a special time and for some it could be something simpler like a coffee in the morning or the sound of birdsong.

For me, it's music. The thought of life without music doesn't bear thinking about. For preference, it usually has to be very loud, shouty rock music, but I like lots of things and different days call for different bands or styles (except free-form jazz and beepy dance music). Most people are affected by music one way or another, even if it's just background noise, which is probably why there's at least one radio in every home.

Lockdown has shown us that one place we can't live without music is during worship. For most of us, not singing in church is just alien. During our brief stint at face-to-face worship services last year, one of the common reasons for the lack of people booking places in the congregation was that they couldn't sing. If you've ever attended a non-religious wedding or funeral, the lack of hymns/songs can sometimes make the event feel a bit incomplete. And for those who enjoy singing, but who aren't part of a choir, church is one of the only opportunities we have for corporate singing.

It's no surprise we feel this way, though. Music has always been an intrinsic part of the worship of God; there's references all over the Bible to the people of God singing and a whole book devoted to it! The Psalms and other books of the Old Testament also mention a wide range of musical instruments used in the praise of God; cymbals, psalteries, trumpets, flutes, lyres, etc. It was clearly not a quiet affair! Since then, the church has incorporated many styles of music from Gregorian chanting, the sung offices of monasteries and convents, to hymns in English and the revolution of hymn writers such as the Wesleys who wrote what, at the time, was seen as more worldly music and shunned by some. Thanks to the spread of Christianity all over the world, we now have every imaginable style of music used in worship (even loud rock music, hooray!), which is a great way of illustrating the creativity and inclusivity of God's interactions with us.

The diversity of music also allows us to use it in church in lots of different ways, whether we're after joyful praise or quiet reflection. Sung prayers, particularly, have always been a valuable element of worship and can sometimes bring greater inspiration and a feeling of closeness to God. So, it doesn't really matter what sort of music we use, as long as it's made for, and reflects, the glory of God in whatever form that takes. Even so, I have often wondered if He has a favourite musical style or hymn/song!

Thankfully, with the wonders of technology, we have managed to keep music as part of our worship in lockdown and, until we're allowed to sing in church again, we can keep going with all the You Tube clips and pre-recorded instrumentals. Admittedly, it's not quite the same as turning up and being able to belt out a chorus of 'To Thine be the Glory', but at least we can still click the mute button and do it at home - we'll still be heard, probably by the neighbours, but never mind! - and be inspired by it. Keep calm and carry on singing/playing!

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