

Dear Friends

Hymn #716 in Voices United is given the title “My Life Flows On” but most of us know it by the phrase that comes at the end of its verses, “How can I keep from singing?”. It is a hymn that was written in the 19th century by Baptist minister Robert Lowry however we count it among the newer hymns we sing. That is because it was seldom sung in 20th century churches, simply because it was never included in most hymn books. But in the 1960’s folk singer Pete Seeger discovered it and recorded it (changing some of the more religious language). It began to be sung, it became familiar, and when it was included in Voices United in the 1990’s (religious language back in place) it was like welcoming home a long forgotten friend.

In the last two weeks I have read several articles about the future of singing in a post pandemic world. The worst case scenarios are dire and people speculate about an indefinite suspension of choir and congregational singing and what this means for Christian worship. One article even suggested that people who talk loudly may be a problem and that struck a little too close to home!!

I’m not overly worried about it though. I am reminded in Ecclesiastes 3 that “there is a time to keep silence” and if it is a longer period of time it will not be forever. I am also buoyed by the knowledge that God places a song in our hearts and invites us to sing it. Whether we are heard by the person standing next to us is immaterial. That holy song is there and will not be silenced. Finally, I am also struck by the creativity and imagination, the work-around-the-problem thinking, that we have witnessed ever since the state of emergency began. Musicians, our own most emphatically, have been extremely inventive when it comes to keeping the song alive. I expect they will continue to be so.

We are moving towards summer and at Charleswood we have a summer tradition called *My Favorite Hymn*. It is an opportunity for someone at church to request a hymn that we all sing together. It’s lots of fun and it deserves to continue. So here’s the deal. You email me with your favorite hymn and a sentence or two about why it means something to you. I will do my best to include it in the video services in the weeks ahead. Together our voices will continue to sing.

Perhaps we can be re-assured that not everything is going to change because of what we are experiencing. We are a singing people and as a favorite hymn reminds us:

*Through all the tumult and the strife,
I hear the music ringing:
It finds an echo in my soul –
how can I keep from singing?*

Grace and peace,

Michael