Music Lessons: The Hard Work of Harmony

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Good morning, class. It's good to see you all here for our third week of music lessons. This week's lesson is on harmony, but first, let's review. Last week, Dr. Beck instructed us on the topic of melody. He told us, "Our mission, should we choose to accept it, is to be the love of God in this world."

Harmony builds upon melody. A melody can be played with a lone instrument or sung by a soloist. And if we all sounded like Brian Fitts, we'd be just fine singing melody all day long. But even Brian, for all his giftedness, shares in harmony with the YES choir, duets, and the Jazz quartet.

Our lives are the same way. We were created by God not to be alone, but to be in relationship with one another, even as Godself is in perfect harmony in the Trinity. None of us can do life all on our own. We rely upon others and others rely upon us each and every day. And the more we are in harmony with those around us, the more beautiful our song in the world will be.

For our lesson today, let's start with a few definitions that are key to our understanding of harmony.

First, the definition for **harmony** itself. It comes from the Greek word, *harmonia*, and describes the union, agreement, or concord of sounds.

So then, what is unity?

**Unity** is the state of being joined or united as a whole; parts working together.

We should keep in mind that the words unity and uniform do not mean the same thing, though they do have the same root. The prefix uni- means one. Unity is parts being joined as one, not that they parts **are** one. That is what uniform means.

**Uniform** is having the same form or manner, not varying. It is literally one form.

Uniform is all parts being the same; unity is coming together as one. Unity and harmony have much in common.

With our definitions under our belt, we can explore harmony. To do this, please take out your text books, also known as our purple hymnals, and turn to hymn #70. This song can be sung as a simple melody, or as a more

complex harmony. To begin, Brian and Jordan will lead us in singing it once through as melody.

*Sing "What Does the Lord Require of You" through one time.*

The first step in harmonizing our lives is to find harmony with God. It is uniting our melody line to God's melody line. Fred instructed us last week that harmony consists of intervals between notes. Our Western ears are attuned to harmonies like we hear in chords (*Jordan plays a chord*). The notes are spaced certain intervals apart. Now, what happens when one of those notes becomes unruly and gets too close to its neighbor? (*Jordan plays a very bad chord)* Ugh. That sounds more like dis-chord (pun intended!).

"What does the Lord require of you?" the prophet Micah asks. This question is a good place to begin to find our harmony with God. We seek to know in our lives what it is that God wants from us. How we can be in harmony with God's work in the world.

To find that harmony takes discernment through reading God's word in scripture, praying, and listening. It takes making space from what **we** would have God say and do, and truly discerning what God's will is. If we take a step back from always knowing what is right, from leading with our ego, we can truly find harmony with God.

To illustrate our harmony with God, we will sing just the first line from the song, using an interval to add harmony.

(*Sing the first line of the song- What does the Lord require of you?)*

The second step of harmonizing our lives is finding harmony within the church. This is where our definitions start to come in handy. Remember that unity is not the same as uniformity? To find unity within the church, all of our different voices and gifts come together as one. Some may even call it the Body of Christ. To use Paul's metaphor of body, uniformity would look like a church full of mouths, or hands or elbows. Thank goodness we're not a church full of elbows!

But that doesn't mean that finding harmony with one another is always easy. The apostle Paul wrote letter after letter to the early churches instructing them on how to be the church. In the portion of his letter to the Romans we read today, he writes: "Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers."

Increasingly, social scientists have noted, that churches are one of the only places that people go and interact with folks whose opinions differ from their own. Own society is becoming pockets of homogeneity, and chances to interact respectfully with those who differ are becoming fewer and fewer. And so we have less practice and more trouble doing so when it's asked of us.

It is vital to the church and to our society to keep our churches as this type of place. Where different voices are welcomed. Where the status quo is challenged. Where we learn to have difficult conversations about faith, life, politics, and policy. Because if we have them here, we also have the chance to break bread and share one cup, and remember our unity in Christ.

The harmony of the church's voice is crucial to our world. We can set the example we wish our elected leaders to follow: loving what is genuine, hating evil, loving one another, and going above and beyond to show honor.

Let us sing these high, resounding notes of harmony, inspiring others with our example.

(*Sing the descant line- To seek justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly with our God- and add to first line.*)

The third step of harmony comes outside of ourselves and our church. You guessed it- it's harmonizing with the world. And again, it's hard work. In this harmonization, let's think again in chords. Let us hear God's note first. (*Jordan plays middle note of a chord.*) Next, let us pause and listen to the note played by the community around us (*Jordan plays second (high) note.*), for God is at work in our communities. Lastly, let us sound our own note (*Jordan plays third (low) note.*), working to be in harmony with both God and our community.

By waiting, giving respect, following Paul's guidelines of loving and caring for others, these notes will sound in beautiful harmony. (*Jordan play all three notes together as a chord.*) The note we sound is not fancy, it is not loud, it is not out for it's own glory. The note we sound is played with God and others in mind, seeking to blend with the two.

Our Old Testament and New Testament scriptures echo each other this morning. If we read them in the reverse order, it becomes a little more apparent. The end of our Romans passage is this: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." And then we move to the prophet Amos, "Seek good and not evil, that you may live…Hate evil and love good, and

establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph."

What is the evil we are to overcome? I suggest that in this context, evil is anything that lessens the humanity of our neighbor. Anything that takes us out of harmony with our neighbor and the world and into discord. Anything that degrades what God has called good—living together in community, the goodness of creation, the dependence all living things have on one another.

With this as our definition, I can think of about 20 examples of evil that I have committed this morning, most of which I didn't give a second thought. The energy that runs my house & car is made from the burning of fossil fuels. I don't buy 100% organic fair trade items, so chances are very good that the food I eat and the clothes I wear are produced using chemicals that can harm the environment and by people who are not paid enough. I drink almond milk even though the production of almonds in places like California uses vast amounts of water that they don't have to spare. I could go on, but you get the picture.

And when we look at it like that, it's just plain depressing. It's easy to be overwhelmed by all the injustices and inequalities in the world. We can be overcome by the evil of our daily lives, no matter how well we try to live them. And when we're overcome and overwhelmed, the easiest and most natural thing to do is nothing.

But God instructs us to go on. To keep sounding the note of good in the midst of the discord of evil. To play our melody which is being God's love in the world. To continue making what harmony we can with God, our churches, and our neighbors. And as we sound our note, play our melody and make our harmony, we can be inspired to continue.

Micah 6:8 sums up God call to us. Simple yet hard instructions: seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. Let us put the sounds of our harmony together, using all three parts, and sing the song through a few times. Let yourself be overcome by the beauty of the harmony, be inspired by the unity of voices in different parts, and by the memorable words of Micah. That all of us may continue to do the hard work of harmony.

*Sing together.*

Amen.