

Psalm 145

- ¹ I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name for ever and ever.
- ² Every day I will bless you,
and praise your name for ever and ever.
- ³ Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
his greatness is unsearchable.
- ⁴ One generation shall laud your works to another,
and shall declare your mighty acts.
- ⁵ On the glorious splendor of your majesty,
and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.
- ⁶ The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed,
and I will declare your greatness.
- ⁷ They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness,
and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.
- ⁸ The Lord is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
- ⁹ The Lord is good to all,
and his compassion is over all that he has made.

Jo Nygard Owens
July 3, 2016
Hymn Sing Sunday
Psalm 145:1-9

Have you ever heard an out-of-tune piano? They can often be found collecting dust in church fellowship halls. Kids sit down at the keys and bang out “Chopsticks” or “Mary Had a Little Lamb.” These are about the only two songs such an instrument is good for, because not even Joyce or Mary here could coax beautiful music out of an un-tuned piano.

But once the piano is tuned, it can produce beautiful music even in the hands of a 5-year-old. Musicians tune their instruments. Vocalists tune their voices. Athletes tune their bodies. As Christians, we tune our hearts.

But why? What is the practice of tuning all about? With instruments, it’s a series of painstakingly small adjustments to ensure each note corresponds correctly to the next, and each instrument can play in harmony together.

In the hymn, *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*, the second line implores, “Tune my heart to sing thy grace.” How do we go about tuning our hearts to sing out God’s grace?

Our answer for today is in the singing itself. Don Saliers, a United Methodist minister in Georgia and father of one of the Indigo Girls—knows a little something about music. He writes, “When we sing, words are given greater range and power than when we speak. Something is shared in singing that goes beyond the words alone. Among Christians, this something has taken shape over many centuries in a practice that expresses our deepest yearning and dearest joy: the practice of singing our lives.”

We Christians are singers, and it doesn’t matter how your voice sounds! The practice of singing inscribes words on our brains and our hearts. These words are available to us and can move us in times of joy or sorrow and everything in between.

The Psalmist speaks of singing God’s praise and of sharing God’s works between one generation and another. Our hymns do this. Charles Wesley, father of the English-speaking Methodist movement, and his brother John were avid hymn writers. These faithful men knew how to teach their flock—through song. We know hymns by Charles like *Christ the Lord is Risen Today*, *Come Thou Long Expected Jesus*, *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing*, and *Love Divine All Loves Excelling* to name a few out of thousands. These songs have been sung for close to three hundred years, and they will inform our faith for many years to come.

In our service today, you all have chosen hymns that tune our hearts in many ways. We can sense the nearness of God in the modern hymn *God of the Sparrow*, as the words recount images from stories in the Bible. We are moved to praise and “bless God’s name” in the spiritual *Every Time I Feel the Spirit*. And how can *Amazing Grace* fail to tune our hearts to sing God’s grace?

Saliers notes, “Over time, participation in the practice of lifting [our] voices to God [works] in subtle and complex ways to shape basic attitudes, affections, and ways of regarding [ourselves], [our] neighbors, and God.” *Here I Am, Lord* reminds us that God calls the unlikely to spread the kingdom. This hymn is a favorite among youth because just like the prophet Isaiah, they too can be called by God.

The hymn that received the most votes is *Be Thou My Vision*. This Ancient Irish hymn continues to find life and tune hearts in congregations around the world. In it, we ask God over and over to be first in our lives. That in all areas of our lives—our waking and sleeping, our thoughts and treasure, God is to be our vision, our ruler, our everything.

As the Colossians are reminded, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God” (Col. 3:16). And what is our closing song *Shine, Jesus, Shine* but a means to fulfill this admonition? “Fill our hearts with the Father’s glory” the song says.

Hymn-writer John Bell of Iona, Scotland knows how important music can be in the tuning of hearts. Bell started his work in ministry working with under-privileged kids. He found that the questions and struggles in their lives didn’t match up with the Victorian-era hymns found in their hymnal. So he began writing his own, but he didn’t do it alone. Because hymns are sung in community, Bell felt they should be written in community.

His work puts modern faith and life to song using ancient and contemporary melodies. Eighteen of his hymns are included in our *Glory to God* hymnal! The themes of his hymns give us a broader view of God’s love and role in our lives. Songs like *God Welcomes All*, *Goodness is Stronger Than Evil*, *Take, O Take Me as I Am*, *Will You Come and Follow Me* help us reconcile a world that looks very different from when many of our hymns were written. They tune our hearts to live in justice and mercy, to know that God’s love encompasses all.

If we use hymns to tune our hearts, we will accomplish all that the psalmist asks. We will bless God’s name, we will sing God’s praises, we will declare the mighty acts of God from one generation to another, and we will know God’s mercy extends to us.