

Singing!!

(Short reflection for a song service by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church August 30th, 2020)

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Singing & music.

Something happens when we sing or listen to music.

It changes us.

It transports us elsewhere.

It expresses emotions and thoughts we cannot always find words for.

Our bible readings today remind us that God's people have always sung and made music, they have done so to praise God.

Some of the greatest hymns we have, were composed in the midst of tragedy – Amazing Grace, What A Friend We have in Jesus. Some of the greatest spirituals have been sung to provide hope in the midst of injustice – Swing Low Sweet Chariot.

I have seen those living with dementia who were no longer verbal begin to sing words or hum tunes or tap their feet when familiar music was played or songs sung.

Singing improves our mood, when we sing together it forms a bond, it exercises our brain.

When my mum was dying a harper played to her for about ½ hour, this relaxed her and was beautiful to watch. After it she simply said – Cheryl, why didn't you try that before, you know I love music.

When we sing in worship, we are singing our theology – after all, in times before things were written down, it was in the prayers and singing that the people learned their theology.

I want to leave you with the words of a former minister of the Collins Street Baptist Church, from 1970 until his death in 1980, a Welshman, Rev Ithel Jones (1911 – 1980). Here are some of his thoughts about music and singing and faith.

“When the big thing happens, music gives an entirely different dimension to speech the old Welsh preachers used to break into what was known as ‘Hwyl’. What would happen was that when they came to the climax, to the purple passages if you like, of their sermon, they would no longer speak, they would begin to sing what they were saying and they would do it to quite well defined phrases it was simply that when they came to say great, staggering, incredible things that they would have to add a musical dimension

Was not this something of what the psalmist meant when he said, ‘I will utter my dark sayings upon the harp’. In other words, when he (sic) came to speak of the great mysteries he (sic) would have to sing. And some of his (sic) songs will abide to eternity. It was no use his (sic) saying the mysteries. He (sic) had to utter the mysteries, the dark sayings, ‘upon the harp’.¹

¹ Adapted from ‘The Epilogue’, which I think was given to me by Rev Andrew Woff in the 1990's. Jones' assistant minister at Collins Street was Rev Mervyn Himbury who was part of my congregation at Moreland Baptist Church (1997 – 2005) and when he preached, I recall him almost singing his sermons, exactly like Jones describes here.