

Lesson: Romans 12:9-21
The Gospel: Matthew 16:21-28

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 30, 2020

“The Heart of Music Ministry”
Sermon Preached by Linda Shirck
American Lutheran Church of Sun City

I am so deeply touched and honored that for today's message Linda Shirck will be sharing “The Heart of Music Ministry” in her own words and in her own music. Thanks be to God.

We read in Ephesians 5:19, “Be filled with the Spirit speaking to one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your heart to the Lord.” There are many references in the Bible to music and to singing, the largest of which is the book of Psalms with 150 chapters. Denise read Psalm 150 so joyfully, “Praise Him with the trumpet, praise Him with the strings, praise Him with the flute.” - much like playing the pipe organ. “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.” When Pastor Lowell invited me to choose several hymns that I loved, it was difficult for me to narrow the choices, because I love so many of them. So, today I’m going to play arrangements of four hymns that especially have meaning to me in my faith journey and in my music ministry. The first memory I have of singing hymns is “Children of the Heavenly Father.” As kids we thought that hymn was written just for us, and it felt so good when we heard, “Let the little children come to me.” for of such is the kingdom of heaven. Now we know, as adults, that we’re all children of God at every age, and we are asked to have a childlike faith, being completely dependent on our heavenly Father, trusting him, and being teachable like children so, as you listen to “Children of the Heavenly Father” maybe you'll think of some memories you have of your childhood.

[Music]

When I was baptized as an infant, my parents and my Godparents invited me to join the church, and they promised to raise me in the Christian faith. Then when I was old enough to speak for myself, I was confirmed. In today's Gospel we heard Jesus words, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me.” That's the commitment I made when I was confirmed into the Lutheran church. This song is especially special to me because that's the hymn that our confirmation class chose as our theme song. In recent years, this text has been set to a different melody, but it's the one from the old red hymnal that I love, “Oh Jesus I have promised to serve you to the end, my master and my friend.”

[Music]

Two years after my confirmation, my mom was anxious for me to get home from school so she could tell me that the organist was retiring, and she said, “How would you like to be the next organist?” “Mom I don't know how to play the organ.” although I played the piano. She said, “Well, we'll find someone to give you lessons.” A week later I was enrolled at Wayne State Teachers college in lessons. My lessons consisted of learning the liturgy, three hymns, a prelude, an offertory, and a postlude, and, four weeks later at the age of fifteen, I became the next organist at Salem Lutheran Church in Wakefield. I've been playing almost continuously since then. This year marks 55 years. This next hymn is to honor my parents, who I credit for getting me into the music ministry. It was their favorite hymn, sung at their wedding, at both of their funerals, and many special occasions in between, and whenever I hear this song, I think of my mom's words. She would stop what she was doing and say, “They're playing our song.” It reminds me of my parents' faithfulness and of God's faithfulness to our family, and the name of this hymn that means so much to me – “Great Is Thy Faithfulness.”

[Music]

In 1975 I received a phone call from All Saints Episcopal Church in Omaha, Nebraska, asking me to fill in for four weeks for them while they looked for a permanent replacement. Their organist of many, many years had died suddenly. Well that four weeks turned into 20 years. After I left All Saints, I was a substitute and an intentional interim many, many times, and each time I received a call I would pray, “Is this the right time for me to take on this assignment?” because I was also working full time, raising a family, and going to graduate school, and the answer to my prayer each time was, “Here I am Lord. Is it I Lord? I can hear you calling in the night. I will go Lord if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.” As you know, this is also the Stephen Ministers' theme song, and now I'm going to look forward to spending more time in this important ministry and with my care receiver. I'll continue to pray this hymn as I look for other ways to serve in the many other ministries in this church. I feel so blessed to have had this opportunity to be working with Pastor Lowell in worship planning, and I'm very grateful for the support that you have shown to me personally and especially for our music ministry here, your support of the choirs, of our concert series, and of WNA music programs, all of those things that have led many of you here to this church. And now I'm very happy and grateful that Dr. James Gerber has answered the call to be your next music minister.

[Music]