

Today's sermon is a different
kind of style and in three segments.
Today I want to talk about passionate worship.

Last Sunday, if you were here,
I think we would all agree was passionate worship right?
But what made it passionate?
Was it because the youth led it instead of adults?
Was it because of the praise and worship music?
Was it because we were engaged
with both our heart and our heads?
What is passionate worship?

Bishop Robert Schnase in his book
Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations
says passionate worship connects people
to God and to one another.

People gather consciously as the Body of Christ,
with eagerness and expectancy,
encounter Christ through singing, prayer, Scripture,
preaching and Holy Communion and respond
by allowing God's spirit to shape their lives.
He goes on to say that lives shaped by God' spirit
become the nucleus for congregations
with extraordinary warmth, graciousness and belonging.

People are searching for worship
that is authentic, alive, creative,
and comprehensible where they experience the life
changing presence of God in the presence of others.
Passionate.

Notice that nowhere in Schnase's definition
is the style of music mentioned.
But if there is one thing we are passionate
about in worship it is our music.
One woman said the music department in her church
should be called the war department.
Worship wars happen all the time.

Traditional vs contemporary
(which means usually praise and worship music
with a band that has drums and
screens that projects the words or images).

People in many a church have battled
to the death over their style.
Take the young man who complained to his father
one Sunday after church about how dull
the hymns were that Sunday.

His father encouraged him to see
what he could do about that problem.
So the young man began to write.
He wrote beautiful worship music

that congregations began singing
but what he wrote was unlike anything
they had heard before.
It was contemporary music.

There was such a great controversy in the church
that soon people began calling him a tool of the devil.
Many of the people including pastors
couldn't recognize that his music compositions
were translations of the Psalms.
How could "Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun"
be [Psalm 72](#), not familiar with that one?

Perhaps this will help.
How could "O God Our Help in Ages Past" be [Psalm 90](#)?
Or "Joy to the World" really be [Psalm 98](#)?
By now you have probably figured out
that I am talking about Sir Isaac Watts whose music
we have sung this morning.

He has been hailed as the man who
virtually single-handed, introduced, developed,
and invented the hymn as we know it today.
It may seem to us that hymns have been a fixture
in the church since time immemorial but before Watts
it was psalm singing not hymns that formed the
main musical component of church services.

Though German Lutherans had been singing
hymns for a 100 years, they sang only metrical psalms.
Watts didn't reject metrical psalms;
he simply wanted to see them more impassioned.
"They ought to be translated in such a manner
as we have reason to believe David would
have composed them if he had lived in our day," he wrote.

A hymn in the most general definition
is a song of praise to God.
Guess what hymn actually means
no its not the opposite of her...Guess...Praise.

Watts hymns were often based on the psalms
but he put them into a moving new language
of personal worship that anyone could understand.

In the preface to Hymns and Spiritual Songs published in 1707,
which included one of the most popular hymns of all time
When I Survey the Wondrous Cross, he wrote these words.
"I have aimed at ease of numbers and smoothness of sound
and endeavored to make the sense plain and obvious;
if the verse appears so gentle and flowing
as to incur the Censure of feebleness,
I may honestly affirm that sometimes
it has cost me labor to make it so."

Translation.

He made the hymns loose and easy to sing,
dumbed down the verses and it was hard for him to do it.
Such looseness brought criticism.

"Christian congregations have shut out divinely
inspired psalms and taken in Watts's flights of fancy,"
protested one detractor.

Others dubbed the new songs "Watts's whims."

But after church splits, pastor firings, and other arguments,
Watts's paraphrases won out.

And many of the 700 hymns he wrote are still
beloved today including We are Marching to Zion
an update of his Come We That Love the Lord
and This is the day the Lord hath made
the updated version we are singing today.

Let us join in a responsive reading of Psalm 150.

Psalm 150

After I'll Fly Away

I mentioned earlier that Watts started writing
because he thought the hymns were dull in church.
Here is what he actually said.

"To see the dull indifference, the negligent
and thoughtless air that sits upon the faces
of a whole assembly,
while the psalm is upon their lips,
might even tempt a charitable observer
to suspect the fervency of their inward religion."

Could the same be said about us even just sometimes?

I don't claim to know what kind of heart
you bring to worship every week.

To be honest it is often hard to read from your faces
where you are at and how present you are in worship.
Part of my job is to do everything
that I can to engage you in the
prayer time, the music, the sermon.

I've been trying to help us to see the importance
of the prelude time and preparing for worship.
I haven't done that as a way to chastise or scold you
or say what we have been doing is wrong
but simply as an additional way to bring passion to worship.
That is why I might change things up
and have us sing the introit twice
or say now a second time with some feeling.

Those things are not an indication that you weren't
just a way to help us focus intentionally
when sometimes we might just be on auto pilot.

If I hurt anyone's feelings in my passion
for worship I sincerely apologize.
But I think we all have come to worship
on auto pilot at some time.

We don't feel too passionate about being here.
It may even feel like this.
A little boy had gone to church with his mother.
They were standing in the foyer of the church
when the little boy looked up.
On the wall was a plaque commemorating
those who had died in the military.
The little boy said, "What's that, mommy?"
His mother replied, "That's a commemorative plaque
honoring those who died in the service."
The little boy looked stunned and said,
"Which one 8:30 or 11:00?"

Schnase writes that many times we
unconsciously enter worship in the evaluative posture
of someone preparing a movie critique.
We rate the sermon, the time for children, the prayer,
and the music according to some internal scale.

How was the service?
Well the sermon was too long,
the piano was too loud,
the children too noisy and the room too cold.

Our attention turns to the imperfections,
mispronunciations, missed cues,
discordant sounds, personal discomforts
and the weaknesses of the leaders
and the flaws of fellow worshippers.

But instead if we have a mind-set of expectancy
we would discover that God wants a relationship
with us and seeks to say something through the time together.
What is God saying to me through the scripture
even if it is read imperfectly,
through the sermon even if the illustrations are weak
and through the unifying power of music
even if the music drags the pace a little?

Am I allowing God's spirit to form me,
change me, transform me through these experiences or
am I evaluating the quality of entertainment?
It is just entertainment is usually the argument
against modern praise and worship music.
But is that what you experienced last Sunday?
Was it entertainment or authentic and passionate
worship in a different style than we are used to?

I'll be honest with you I was nervous that
the youth, who have never fully lead all of worship
in both services, would receive negative comments
about contemporary music.
To your credit though all they heard was praise
but it could have sounded like this.

"I am no music scholar, but I feel I know

appropriate church music when I hear it.
Last Sunday's new hymn –
if you can call it that –
sounded like a sentimental love ballad
one would expect to hear crooned in a saloon.
If you insist on exposing us to rubbish like this –
in God's house! –
don't be surprised if many of the faithful
look for a new place to worship.
The hymns we grew up with are all we need."

That was a letter written in 1863,
and the song they were talking about was
the contemporary song "Just as I Am".
Most of the music written in the 1800's and early 1900's
are what is called gospel songs not hymns.
Gospel songs have a chorus hymns usually do not.

We sang Lilly of the Valley, I'll Fly Away.
Blessed Assurance.
Probably the greatest of the songs written
by blind Fanny Crosby who wrote
9,000 hymns after the age of 40.
She wrote so many in fact that publishers
made her use over 100 pseudonyms over her career.

Some of the songs we sang today
you might not have sung in a while
because they are not in our hymnal.
They are in the old Cokesbury hymnal
and the Faith We Sing.
Many folks think the FWS has only new songs
but it also has very old ones.

Even these beloved songs faced controversy.
"What is wrong with the inspiring hymns
with which we grew up?
When I go to church, it is to worship God,
not to be distracted with learning a new hymn.
Last Sunday's was particularly unnerving.
The tune was un-singable and the
new harmonies were quite distorting."
This letter was written in 1890
about the hymn "What A Friend We Have In Jesus"

Having us learn new songs and hymns
is certainly something you can accuse me of.
Guilty as charged.
I probably go overboard with it
but in my defense I really don't know
what songs you know and don't know.
I just try to find music that fits with
the worship that Sunday.

That is important to me and you have been
so gracious to allow me to do that with you.

And a pleasant surprise is how quickly you learn the new ones and sing them with the same enthusiasm as the known ones. Rest assured that I won't be leaving out the favorites though. I like a wide variety of music.

Scripture Lesson

One pastor described his intention for leading passionate worship by saying in each service he tries to engage the intellect and the heart of the worshippers. Through engaging the intellect, they learn something about the content of faith. They learn about God, Jesus, the stories of scripture, the practice of the faith

Through engaging the heart he reaches the interior of the worshippers. The intimacy of worship helps them know mercy, grow in hope, sense the Holy Spirit, experience grace, offer and receive forgiveness.

And the finally the pastor seeks to engage people with a practical challenge to do something in their family, community and world because of their faith in Christ. That is my intention as well.

I choose different types of music to show the depth of our Christian tradition and the fact that it is constantly changing. And that is where the C word gets us. For as we have seen contemporary musically has meant change.

The praise and worship music of today is not like the choruses of the 60 & 70's, or the gospel songs of the 1900 & 1800's, the hymns of the 1700's or the psalms before that.

But the interesting part is that the music of the 2000's is looking to the hymns and psalms for inspiration. Amazing Grace (My chains are gone). The Wondrous Cross. Come Thou Font of Every Blessing. Nothing but the blood. Let Everything that has breath praise the Lord.

These are praise and worship songs that do as Isaac wrote 300 years earlier: are written to be as if David had written them today. They are full of passion and heart. They scare many of us because they are not our future but our present. We begin to think that our style of worship will be lost in the transition.

Every generation encounters the same thing
it's just that the world is changing faster than it ever has.
There has been more change especially in technology
and society in the last 50 years than
in the hundreds of years before.

And what one generation finds to be
passionate in worship may or may
not be passionate to the next.
There is nothing wrong with that.
Worship can be a strong robust cup of coffee
or it can be a frothy café ameno cappuccino
and still be relevant and meaningful.
Different flavors that's all.
We all have our own flavor.

But there is a decision that we as a congregation
will have to make in all this change.
And that is will we manage the change
or let the change manage us?

I want you to look around the room and notice
who is sitting next to you.
Now I want you to think about who will probably
be sitting in those pews in 20 years
if something doesn't change.
What about in 40 years?
Who is missing from our congregation?
The younger people 20-40's.

Where are your children, grandchildren, great grandchildren?
Many of them attend other churches
including 24 church.
24 church worships 300 plus people every Sunday.
30 people were baptized a couple of weeks ago.

Now I want to be clear I don't see a need
for PVUMC to compete or be 24 church.
They are out there on the fringe reaching
a whole new group of people
and they are also reaching many of us as well.

But our youth and others have been asking
for sometime for a worship style
that is meaningful and relevant to them.
You saw last Sunday a little bit of what that looks like.
Well folks this is how worship wars begin.

What service would be changed?
What would it take? Who will be hurt?
Who might have to change services to
find worship meaningful to them?
How many of you would be willing
to change services and sacrifice your comfort zone
to meet the heart of the next generation and bring them in these doors?

To many of us Them's fightin words.

And no it's not going to be the preacher
who decides those things arbitrarily
so I can be the lightning rod.

What I am suggesting instead
is that conversation and dialogue begins
to happen across every generation as to
how we can all work together to provide passionate worship
with our unique United Methodist beliefs for every generation
because there is no where else in Pleasant View
where that can offered. Only us.

But this is not something we are going to vote on
and as long as it is a 51-49 win we do it.
That is not how church is supposed to work.
There will always be some who cannot move forward
but everyone has a right to be heard
and included in the decision.

Then inspired by the Holy Spirit and
with God's discernment,
we as a congregation make decisions.
This isn't going to happen this week
or next month or maybe even next year
but dialogue and listening is slow
so I think we better start now before it is too late.

In 1987 I was entering into MTSU
and beginning to find the Christian faith.
That would still a couple of years a way
but instrumental in that journey was this man
and the very early beginning of what would become contemporary Christian music.
[\(Show video\)](#)

And for me Rich Mullins is
a part of my story and many others.
He was real and authentic.
But his music was different.

But maybe if there is anything that we
can learn from the story of Watts and others
is to not discount someone's personal experience
of God because of their style of worship
whether it is traditional, contemporary, alternative,
taize, or emerging.

Everyone should be able to come to passionate worship
that engages their head and their heart
in the way they feel most comfortable.
I hope that is the gift that in the days ahead we will
be able to provide to the current generation
we struggle to keep and the future generations to come.

A hundred years ago a congregation

had three generations present in worship
and all spoke the same language,
shared the same culture,
grew up with the same stories and
enjoyed the same style of music.
Now congregations include four or more generations
and each has its own preferred way of communicating,
its own distinctive taste in music,
its own language and culture.
The times they are a-changing.

Schnase leaves us with this thought
“A congregation that is willing to navigate
the perilous cross currents of conflicting
worship preferences to offer two styles of worship
with faithfulness and excellence is an
example of a passionate congregation.”

Are we passionate about reaching out to those not here?
What are we willing to sacrifice?
Can we find willingness in our hearts to support
something we don't personally appreciate
and probably will never attend?

All they want is a chance to worship God where they are.
These are tough questions that the church
has had to ask itself continually
since the time of Isaac Watts.
Now it is our turn.
What will be our answer? Amen.