

Scripture: Psalm 100, Matthew 28:16-20

Sermon Title: "Sing Out!"

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Some of my fondest memories that I have with my Father are from my high school years. Now, being on a dairy farm, I was always expected to help with the work and so I would share in the daily milking routine, helping my Dad with this reoccurring task. And during those times of working together, my Dad and I started to talk more and more about religion, perhaps because I was already in the midst of discerning a sense of calling into ministry or at least becoming more active in the church. We would talk about faith, about church, about theology – about what we believe and why. Some of our conversations were just friendly chatting, others would lead to spirited debates, and others would end in us sharing our personal experiences with one another. And I got the sense that my Dad started to look forward to these conversations as much as I did.

I remember one conversation when my Dad shared with me a memory and some words of wisdom from his father, my grandfather about one's posture in church. And what I picture is my young Dad, probably bored and not so thrilled to be at church, holding a posture that showed this fact. You know the sort of posture, right? He might have been hunching a little, leaning. I then picture my grandfather who saw his son, a perfectly able bodied boy, leaning on the pew in front of him as the congregation stood once more, and he said to my dad, "if you can't stand in church, how will you be able to stand before God?" "If you can't stand in church, how will you be able to stand before God?"

Though I never got to meet my paternal grandfather because he passed away before I was born, this memory, this pondering, this piece of wisdom passed down through my father has always stayed with me. And the picture that it conjures up in my mind whenever I find myself dwelling on this wisdom, is my grandfather, who worked hard all life, served in the military, whose physical body knew in its lifetime much strain and many aches, standing tall while singing a hymn, and even if his body hurt, he was

leaning on nothing but the words of Truth revealed in the verses and the refrain. Upheld by nothing but the sweet notes of the organ and the deep Truths that they too revealed in their sound. And then I picture next to him my young father, letting go of the pew, standing up straight, and beginning to sing out as well. This memory, this wisdom, and the picture it conjures has stuck with me and I'll still even find myself in a moment of worship recalling it – particularly if I find myself slouching a little or leaning a little too much. And this shared memory does not come back in a “stand up straight” or else sort of way, but as a gentle reminder to ask myself why am I leaning, why am I slouching, why am I looking to the things around me for support? And as I ask myself these questions, I realize that there are indeed good reasons for leaning and needing support – whether its health issues – pains and strains on our physical body, or for emotional reasons – when in the midst of sorrow and grief, and other reasons too that may require one to lean, to look down. But if my answer was not one of these, I would feel myself straightening up again, thinking of my grandfather, picturing my dad, and see all three of us standing tall together to worship.

In our first reading for today, in Psalm 100, we hear of a call to make a joyful noise to the Lord. This call to trust in who our God is and to give thanks. To find strength in the everlasting love of our God. And to make that joyful noise. And as any of our choir members will tell you and when we forget Leela will remind us, posture is important – posture will effect in essence the level of joyfulness that will be produced as we sing! When we straighten up the noise that we make naturally seems to become more joyful and more powerful– fuller, richer. Our posture allows us to sing out in new ways! It allows us to embody the joy of which we read in this Psalm – to feel these truths of our great God, to give thanks, to sing as those transformed by the love of God, to sing as those who know of our God's faithfulness. Posture is important.

However, this posture piece, the call to not lean but to stand tall – stand firm, stand like you are rooted on Christ the solid rock which need no other support, does not only touch our singing. The call to stand up proudly in the love of God, not with your head

down but up for the love of God lifts us, this call does not only touch our times of worship. When I think of that piece of wisdom, share by my grandfather, passed on through my father, I see so much more than a truth that lives only in one hour on Sunday morning. But a truth that extends to every hour in which we live – a truth about our posture in life.

In the Great Commission that comes from our scripture reading according to the Gospel of Matthew, we hear of the tall order that the disciples were given and which is passed on to us as well. To spread the Good News of Jesus to all nations and to teach all the things that Christ commanded. In essence, to share of Jesus in all that we say and all that we do. To not only teach in word what Christ commanded, but to strive to live it out ourselves so that our very lives can teach. To live as Christ's disciples, live as those who have been touched by the love of God and be witnesses of that great love. This is not a call to be met with a downtrodden posture in our body or in our spirit. This is one to be met with head held as high as you can, standing firm, leaning on Christ our rock who is with us all throughout the ages. For when this is our posture in life, just as in worship, just as in singing, our lives can sing out in a more joyful, more powerful, richer, fuller way. When we live as those who have not been defeated by the challenges of this world but as those who are held up by the strength of our God, our lives are transformed in wonderful ways.

Yes our physical posture in singing and our metaphorical posture in life have a way of changing what we produce. Our singing changes and those richer, fuller more joyful noises spring forth. Our lives change, for when we find our confidence and our strength in the love of God, our lives can proclaim God's glory in those richer, fuller ways. For you see, our lives are kind of like a song. And just as music has the ability to empower us, to speak into our lives, to strengthen us when we feel weak, comfort us in our sorrow, rejoice with us in our delight, minister to us through all the days of this journey called life, as Christ's disciples, our call is to do the same with our lives. To join the song that has proclaimed God's love since the very beginning as we live for God and live as

followers of Jesus - To live our lives so they too can empower, strengthen, comfort, bring joy, and minister. So as we sing of our Great God, as we sing of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, whether with our voices through the resonate truths of our hymns and anthems or with our lives through the gospel truth that we carry forth in the Great Commission, may our spirits stand up, stand proud, and sing out! Amen.