**Make a Joyful Noise!**

**Text: Colossians 3:16**

**Preached by Bruce D. Ervin**

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Springhill, Nova Scotia is a gritty mining community in Atlantic Canada. It’s the hometown of singer Anne Murray. And for much of its history its economy has been based on coal. It sits atop the Foord Seam, a rich vein of coal that runs the length of Nova Scotia. Lots of men have been employed, lots of families have been fed, and lots of homes have been heated by the abundance of that seam of coal.

But, the Foord Seam contains a large amount of natural gas, and it’s prone to explosions and cave-ins. Like the one at Springhill in the fall of 1958. 75 miners were killed, but 12 more were very much alive. Trapped underground, not knowing if they would be rescued, they kept their hope alive by singing. They sang hymns and country music. They sang spirituals and Celtic ballads. All the while a rescue team was trying to reach them. And after 7 days of frantic digging, 12 men of the deep came out of that mine alive.

“With gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.” So the Church is instructed in the Letter to the Colossians. And so the Church has done for the nearly 2,000 years since those words were written. Indeed, the people of God have been singing hymns for much longer. The Psalms were the hymn book of the Hebrew people. And hymns that were sung by the very first Christians can be found in various places in the New Testament. Many of those first Christians were arrested and tortured and killed. They were rejected by their families and persecuted by the Romans. And they sang not despite these conditions but *because* of them. Music has an amazing way of making the heart courageous and the spirit strong in the face of great opposition. With the love of God in their hearts, the power of the Holy Spirit within them and danger all around them, how could they keep from singing?

We sing our faith. Always have. In good times and bad times and in-between times, the Church makes a joyful noise to the Lord. Folks who are reluctant to talk about their faith can sure belt it out in song. People who have faded away into dementia can still sing the hymns of their youth. “Make a joyful noise,” the psalmist says, not only to praise God but also to nurture your own soul. Yes, the soul is nourished by proclaiming the Word and hearing the Word, and Colossians rightly admonishes us to do so. But I think the order in which the elements of worship are listed in our text is not a mistake. The author saves the best for last: first he names the Word, then he extols the virtues of teaching, and then he encourages the Church to sing. The best worship, of course, has both good preaching and good singing. But if I have to choose between the two, I’ll take the service with good singing any day. When I’m sitting in a pew, I can tolerate a bad sermon as long as there’s good music. And yes, folks, you can quote the preacher on that.

Annie Glenn, the wife of astronaut John Glenn, had a serious speech impediment. But when she sang in church, her words were as clear as they could possibly be. That’s the power of music.

 African-Americans, all but crushed under the horrible burden of slavery, kept their hope alive and their spirits strong through singing. That’s the power of music.

Family and friends, gathered in an Iowa church, grieving the loss of a young man killed in a motorcycle accident. So great was their sorrow that even as the hymn began, no one was singing. And the young widow, who was an atheist, thought, “O man, even this service is about to die!” So she started to stomp on the floor in time with the music, and folks starting singing, and even unbelieving heads were lifted heavenward and in the midst of such sorrow, a joyful noise was made. That’s the power of music.

“With gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.” Christa and David Tahere have helped us to do just that these past two years. And so has Jude, with his impromptu solo that one Sunday morning during the Children’s Message. The love of God in their hearts, expressed through their musical gifts, has warmed our hearts and invited us all to make a joyful noise unto the Lord. And so it is that this day, even as tears glisten in our eyes, we have to praise God with a voice of singing!