

**August 15, 2021**  
**“Heart Songs”**  
**1 Kings 3:3-14 / Ephesians 5:15-20**  
**Pastor Tim Emmett-Rardin**

I have to tell you that I had an unusual, though intriguing, experience preparing for worship this week.

For each Sunday's bulletin cover, I include the focus text for the sermon and the service as a whole, along with artwork that in some way connects to the text – at least to my eye. Allow me to bring today's bulletin cover back up for you, noting – especially for those of you who aren't able to see the screen share on your device – that the text comes from our Ephesians reading: “. . . but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts . . . “

In scouring the internet for images, sometimes I stumble across artwork where there is no artist information as far as I can tell, or it's clearly made available as part of the public domain. Sometimes I track down the artist's name but there's no way to contact them. And sometimes I reach the artist and they simply give me permission, grateful that I bothered to ask – and additionally grateful for giving them their appropriate credit.

This week the image in question led me to the artist's Facebook page. Her name is Melody – yes Melody (!) – Holley, and turns out she's a college student in Virginia. I messaged her to ask permission to use her painting, and briefly explained the basic theme and how I'd be using it in connection with the Ephesians text. And she replied, “Of course!” And then, “OMG, that is so amazing! I love it!” And if that wasn't cool enough, she said she wanted to see the sermon. I invited her to join us for worship if she wanted, and gave her the option to read or listen to the sermon – posted on the website after the fact.

And if all of that wasn't cool enough, she also shared a simple story she wrote which I'm gonna share with you now. So here you go, “The Enchanted Melody,” by Melody Holley. Like I said, intriguing.

Once upon a time, an enchanted seed dropped from the heavens and was planted in dry grounds. It slipped in a tiny crackle – not even a cactus could survive these conditions. But that night the skies were gray and stormy. Lightning struck left and right. The little seed grew, up and up it sprouted and the sun shined down on it with love and grace. Whenever it was thirsty and was feeling down, the sky would gently kiss the little tree with rain. That little tree planted its little roots firm in to the ground so when bad storms passed through it wouldn't blow away.

And then that tree grew. Tall and sturdy with pink glittering fruit that attracted many visitors. First there was a squirrel, then a bear and then all the animals would come gather at the tree that gave pink glittering fruit. All of this attention drew people who came to settle down and build a town around this tree with its pink glittering fruit. Pretty soon, the townspeople grew and they got greedy. And the tree was left barren because they ate of it faster than it could replenish. The heavens closed and there was a drought and the townspeople sent a lumberjack to cut down the tree. He swung and swung as hard as he could but the tree would not budge. So the townspeople forgot about the tree and left it there, forgotten and still barren.

One night years later, after all the townspeople left, the heavens opened again and lightning struck the tree and caused a huge fall. The tree lay there broken and damaged. One day a man rode through, and when he saw the tree he was fascinated of its beauty and color. This man happened to be a carpenter. So he took the tree and turned it into the most beautiful violin. He gave the violin to his little boy, so happy and excited was he. He played that violin day and night and practiced over and over the most beautiful melody. When he finally got the courage, he played this enchanted melody for people. The boy loved music and he happily played. Hearts would hear and lives would be transformed. When that little boy grew to be an old man, he retired his violin made by the magical tree but the enchanted melody lived on.

An enchanted melody grown from a tiny seedling that fell in a crack and was watered by the heavens. A tree that was eaten from until it lay barren and forgotten, until it was rediscovered and turned into a violin that played a song that healed hearts and

*transformed lives. The enchanted melody still lives in the heart of the people, passed down from generation to generation, to heal hearts and transform lives today.*

It's sweet, right? I share it with you now because it actually resonates with our focus this morning. There is gospel truth in this story!

The enchanted melody – for our purposes, let's call it the Divine Melody – lives in the hearts of the people. And throughout and in spite of all manner of change in the world, even destruction and death as the empty tomb reminds us again and again, the Divine Melody never stops. The Divine Melody, the very Rhythm of Life and Love that animates and sustains all creation, never stops. That'll preach, friends. That will preach!

Which brings us back to the melody we hear about in Ephesians. I want to suggest to you today that making melody to God in our hearts is ultimately about opening ourselves, ATTUNING ourselves, to the Divine Melody – as Jesus did. Keeping time with the Divine Rhythm of Life and Love. And so more fully and consistently attuning ourselves TO, and keeping time WITH, each other and the rest of creation.

The author of Ephesians – whom scholarly consensus suggests, by the way, is not the apostle Paul as with most of the other epistles – offers some pointers on how to live.

There is talk about the importance of wisdom, echoing the text from 1 Kings that Carl read for us – which marks the beginning of Solomon's reign as Israel's king, immediately following his father David's death. Solomon is famous, of course, for his wisdom, and the reason is revealed in this passage.

In a dream God asks Solomon what he wants, and what Solomon wants before anything else, BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE, is wisdom. In humility he asks God for “an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil.” To live wisely begins with SEEKING wisdom in the first place, acknowledging our limits. That's why the Psalmist says that the “fear of God” – or better translated, “awe of God” – is the beginning of wisdom. We take a step toward wisdom when we rightly and humbly acknowledge that we are not God. Amen to that! We need help.

Ephesians also mentions the importance of making the most of our time, not wasting it. And then we get to the verses from which our focus text comes: “So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God . . . at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Being filled with the Spirit is directly connected here to making melody to God in our hearts. And being filled with the very Spirit of God, in my understanding, is about honoring and accessing and operating more fully from our deepest places; that is, our hearts and our souls. Our most authentic selves. In this way, I believe, our hearts soften and our lives sing. And we are better able to recognize and honor the Spirit of God in each other, to welcome and receive each other's authenticity, each other's deepest selves. As 1 Corinthians 14:15 puts it, we sing with our spirits and with our understanding.

As we've been exploring over the past few weeks, when we are filled by the Spirit our lives are marked less by scarcity and more by abundance. Less by bitterness and more by gratitude. As the text suggests, making melody in our hearts and giving thanks – “at all times and in everything” – go hand in hand. We are able to make melody in our hearts, and so attune our lives to the Divine Melody present in all of life. To the Divine Melody present in each other. That is God's desire, God's will, for all of us. As the saying goes, “The glory of God is a human being fully alive.”

And so “Do not get drunk with wine” is not a specific warning against drinking or drunkenness, but a narrative contrast to being Spirit-filled. In other words, be careful not fill your lives or waste your precious time with anything that doesn't honor and nurture your deepest places. Your authentic, God-given self. And I don't need to tell you, friends; that is a lifelong project. The world does make it easy to hold our center.

Amen? Amen.

A few more thoughts on melody. The passage from Ephesians mentions singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. When we are Spirit-filled, we sing with our voices, with our

hearts and with our lives! But remember, as we considered in contrasting Psalm 22 and 23 last month, that the Psalms reflect the full spectrum of human emotion and experience. Lamentation AND praise. They are heart songs in the fullest sense, meant to be sung, and so it's worth noting here that the melodies in our hearts aren't always jubilant. Melodies come in all shapes and sizes, and that simply speaks to the fullness of life. To live Spirit-filled is to open ourselves to more fully engage the melodies of both pain and joy. Brokenness and beauty. Our own and each other's.

Melody is, by definition, musically satisfying. And so I point to a couple of other scripture texts to help shed further light on the nature and quality and depth of the Spirit-filled lives we are called to live. On what it means to live wisely and to make melody to God in our hearts.

The first is from the prophet Amos. Remember, Amos the "plumbline prophet" as we considered awhile back. Harping as he does, as his fellow prophets do, on the absence of justice, he channels God's disdain. Chapter 5, verse 23: "Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. And then most famously, verse 24: "But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

Take away from me the NOISE of your songs – hear that! The melody of your harps is nothing but noise without melody in your hearts. Without justice, there is no melody, only NOISE. Without justice, we are collectively out of tune with the Divine Melody. The God of Justice.

And likewise and again from Paul's letter to the Corinthians, this from arguably the most well known chapter in 1 Corinthians, chapter 13: "If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." Hear that, friends!

If I do not have love, there is no melody, only NOISE! Without love, love for God, love for our neighbors and love for ourselves, we are – individually and collectively – out of tune with the Divine Melody. The God of Love.

And so I leave you to consider your own heart songs. To consider for yourselves what it means, what it would mean, for you to sing and make melody in your hearts. To sing and make melody to God in your hearts, and so in and with and through your lives. What, for you, gets in the way of singing and making melody in your hearts?

Friends, make room for God's Spirit to fill you. Open your hearts and make room for your heart AND so your life to stay in tune – or get back in tune if need be – with the Divine Melody that never stops. And in time with the Divine Rhythm that never stops. Let your heart and your life sing through pain and brokenness, sing in joy and beauty.

With humility, with wisdom, with gratitude, with love, and always, ALWAYS moving toward justice and the peace that comes with it, we are called to make life-giving music together. And as the old praise song exclaims to God, may "it be a sweet, sweet sound, in your ear."

May it be so.