

GraceSing

Reflections from Joan Christensen

October 2018

As we bring music as comfort to others, I reflect on how **music has comforted me or someone else I know**. I recall times of tears when I have called on a musical selection for comfort - usually a J. S. Bach piece I have a history with: part of a piano suite which I played in the past; a cello suite which my mom used to play; an organ piece played by my Aunt Vivian or Grace organist, Pat Porter; parts of the St. Matthew Passion...I could go on and on.

As GraceSing, we want to reflect on what we are doing in this lovely form of ministry. Here are four ideas important to me.

First, this is such a **ministry** to me. I love singing and music. As I visit the folks who want to hear singing, I am aware of my own joy in that communal act. We are visiting and singing **together**. So, I am **connecting** with other people as I sing.

Second, I think of this act as a **prayer**. Hear Mary Oliver's words:

Praying, by Mary Oliver

It doesn't have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just
pay attention, then patch a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but the doorway into thanks, and a silence in which another voice may speak.

This poem could as well be titled *Singing*.

Singing (paraphrasing Mary Oliver's poem, "Praying")

It doesn't have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just
pay attention, then patch a few **sounds** together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but the doorway into thanks, and a **song** in which another voice may speak.

So, I am **praying** as I sing.

Third, I also think of this singing as reaching into our **memories**, where emotions - as well as the brain - are involved. I *love* singing songs that persons choose from their past. Often those songs are familiar to me - and to us all.

So, I **touch my own past** as I sing.

Fourth, I also appreciate the delightful, joyful, invigorating element of music. Another Mary Oliver poem:

At Blackwater Pond, by Mary Oliver

At Blackwater Pond the tossed waters have settled
after a night of rain.

I dip my cupped hands. I drink a long time. It tastes
like stone, leaves, fire. It falls cold

Into my body, waking the bones. I hear them
deep inside me, whispering

Oh what is that beautiful thing

That just happened?

So, I **feel alive** when I sing our songs together.

I have a hunch that the person-human we visit might have similar thoughts/emotions - and more - that we don't know. I think that one thing we each want and need - and want to affirm in others - is expressed in this quote from Raymond Carver:

Late Fragment by Raymond Carver

And did you get what
you wanted from this life even so?

I did.

And what did you want?

To call myself beloved, to feel myself beloved on the earth.

In closing, I invite you to sing this verse from *I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say*, "Come Unto Me and Rest." The words speak to Oliver's water images in the Christian context. It points at what God is doing through us as our group sings and passes along this prayer, reminiscence, and spark together in song.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
“Behold, I freely give
The living water: thirsty one,
Stoop down, and drink, and live.”
I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him.