

**Everyday Sunday**  
**Part 3: Songs of Praise**  
**Countryside Community Church**  
**Rev. Dr. Chris Alexander**  
August 19, 2018

Scripture: Isaiah 55:8-13 and Psalm 150

**I. The Gift of Earworms**

Up to this point in our series we have talked about ways to intentionally be in conversation with God and step into the flow of God's activity already happening in the world. We have talked about "Guidance Prayers," and "Prayers from the Heart." And we have heard from our Youth about intentionally stepping into service with God for the benefit of others, even those we don't even know. The point of these types of practices is to enter into a certain flow with God in your everyday ordinary lives. We hope that these practices will help us recognize the yearning we have inside ourselves for realizing God's presence with us, to help calm our fears and frustrations, and to empower us with confidence and courage to step in our daily lives expecting to be part of all that God and creation are up to.

Until now it's been about the "flow" of our days. This week we will talk about the importance of intentionally interrupting our days. Holy interruptions are important for those times in our everyday lives where we get so caught up in our own stuff that we fail to take notice of God. This is why we need the reminders set on our phones to help us remember. These reminders are themselves Holy Interruptions. But sometimes we need even bigger interruptions than a simple buzz from our phones to shake us out of our self-obsessions. We need "events" to happen for us so we can begin stepping out in a wholly different direction. This is when we bring out the big stuff! You can do these "events" in several ways, and I would encourage you to find that way that works best for you, but one of my favorite ways is through cranking up the music and getting a little crazy! Not only does it accomplish the goal of serious interruption, but it's also just a lot of fun!

Music can be a sort of "magic" in our lives, in that it is often evocative and draws from us things that we might never have known were inside of us. Earworms are often just such magical things. Have you ever woken up from a sound sleep, and had a particular piece of music running through your head? These are what earworms are: a catchy song or tune that runs continually through your mind, even when you can't actually hear the music being played. Sometimes we are annoyed by a song that we can't get out of our head, but if we stop long enough to notice the song that is stuck, pay attention to its lyrics and expression, it might just be trying to tell us something. God speaks to us in all kinds of ways. Sometimes, if we stop and ask ourselves, *Why this song? Why am I hearing this now?* or *What might my sub-conscience be trying to tell me?* we will be taking the time to intentionally listen for God's voice within the music we are hearing.

Even when an earworm hits you in the middle of the day, or late in the evening, this music might be connecting you to something you experienced within your day but did not pay attention to at the time. Your mind has lots of ways to bring experiences back around for you to review and see

things in them that you did not recognize the first time around. When these opportunities present themselves to you, instead of being annoyed by them, perhaps look at them as windows that allow you to see something new: a different perspective, or an opening that changes the steps that are available to you.

Music has this magical way of helping you to focus on “the moment.” To see things that are often right in front of you, all the time, but, in your scheduled life, you have not actually “seen” them as you are moving around. If you take the time to stop and let the music you are hearing be an interruption in your movement, the change that it effects allows you to pay attention to where you are and what you are presently seeing.

Our scripture today speaks to the use of music as a way to celebrate life in general, but also particularly to celebrate what God does in creation and all of the wonders of the creation that surround us and include us.

Isaiah 55 tells us that all of creation is sent out by God with a purpose and returns to God as it succeeds to accomplish that for which it was sent. Rain and snow are sent forth and do not return until the water they provide gives seed to the sower and bread for those who eat it. Creation is sent out in joy and returns in peace. The mountains burst into song and the trees clap their hands! And Psalm 150 speaks to how creation responds in this same joy to celebrate God’s activity. *Praise God with trumpet sound; praise God with lute and harp! Praise God with tambourine and dance; praise God with strings and pipe! Praise God with clanging cymbals; praise God with loud clashing cymbals! Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!*

One of my favorite stories about creating music in a way that focuses your attention on the “present moment,” is the story of Route 66. The pavement of Route 66 between Albuquerque and Tijeras, New Mexico, has grooves intentionally cut into it so that if you follow the speed limit of 45 mph you will hear the music of “America the Beautiful.” Transportation officials originally approved this in the hopes that it would get cars to slow down on that particular section of historic Route 66. To hear the song at the proper speed and pitch, vehicles must strictly obey the posted speed limit of 45 mph. You can’t hear the song properly if you are going even a few miles under or over the limit.

While we listen to some intentional music for the next few minutes, please think over those times when you have intentionally set out to listen to music in order to change your mood or your outlook on something. Did it work?

Musical Offering at 11:00

## **II. Celebrate Your Interruptions!**

Video: Car Karaoke: *My Generation* by The Who

There are many songs that will light up your soul and fill you with joy. It’s fun to sing in the car. It’s also hard to be impatient with other drivers when your heart is filled with the joy of singing just for fun! Whether the music is traditionally sacred music like hymns, or non-traditional sacred music (any music that reminds you of your relationships with God and your neighbor),

music is a great way to break into the routine of your day and shift your focus to concentrate on those relationships in your life that bring you an abundance of love and laughter. Because music has the ability to capture our attention, it helps us to stop multi-tasking, just enough, to enter into a whole-hearted event! When we intentionally set out to listen to music in order to shift our mood or perspective, we find ourselves letting go of everything else that we had been doing, and calling our attention to the present, participating in the music through singing boldly or playing our air instruments with great gusto! It's not long before you have opened a space for the joy to emerge from within yourself and change how you approach the rest of your day.

Often, we listen to music as background while we do other things. This is helpful in its own way because it does have the capacity to calm us down so we can settle into a particular task. But the Spiritual practice I am talking about today is not music as meditation, but rather, music as interruption! When things start piling up around you, or you have just been rude to someone on the phone or in an email, or you find yourself so buried in your daily routines that you suddenly realize most of the day has flown past you without you even noticing, then you might consider taking a "Holy Interruption!"

Look Up! Notice where you are. Notice who is around you and remind yourself of something you know about each of the people you see. Walk away for a minute from what you had been doing, and find a friend to talk to, or someone to sing with. Explain to them that you need an intentional interruption, and invite them to join you, doing something that reminds you that you are not alone. Find that thing to do together that reminds you that life is not an endless treadmill, but that you have been sent out by God in joy! Remind yourself that mountains and hills are able to burst into song, and all the trees in the fields join in by clapping their hands! Creation was made in awe and wonder, and is constantly praising its Creator in return! You are part of that awesome creation and are given the constant opportunity to join in the praise!

How can your day be dull, boring, or routine if you participate in such a celebration? My day was made infinitely more fun and enjoyable after Will and Steve and I set out to film our Car Karaoke!

As many of you know, my husband Scott is also a pastor, and when he accepted the call to serve First Lutheran Church in Blair, Nebraska, it meant that we would need to move to Blair and live in the home they were providing as a parsonage. For me, this meant my six-minute commute to work would be expanded to a 30-minute commute. I was not thrilled when I got the news. After living in places like Chicago and Minneapolis, I vowed never to live further than 15 minutes away from where I worked. But apparently God saw things differently. I agreed to the daily commute only if Scott would foot the cost of satellite radio for me to listen to on my commute.

Now if you were to see me during my commutes to or from Blair, you would probably point and laugh (and in fact I hope you do, since everyone needs to laugh a little more)! I would love for you all to think that I have my car radio perpetually set to NPR, and that I am always listening to the latest research or the most inspiring podcast, but I'm afraid that is just not who I am. Most days I flip between several different XM radio stations searching for songs that invite me to turn the volume up really loud and sing along – after all, no one is in the car with me to notice how bad my singing is! It's a really good song if I can play the drums while I sing! After 30 minutes

of this intentional practice of playfulness, I find myself in a pretty good mood when I arrive at the church, or I'm totally refreshed from my day and ready to spend some quality family time when I get home. All of the frustrations and annoyances of the day just sort of melt away, so that I don't transfer that frustration to Scott when I arrive. (Disclaimer: I do love my ministry and this marvelous community I serve, but even pastors have hard days at work sometimes!)

Another time I find to intentionally listen to music to set my attitude for the day, or to let go of the stress of the day, is when I do my walking to accomplish my 10,000 steps. I turn the volume up and walk to the beat of the music and challenge myself to follow the drummer with my pretend drumsticks, as I walk along! It's a lot of fun and it does a lot to remind me that there is great joy in my life, and that God's intention for creation is for our joy to be complete. That's a pretty good reminder to take with you as you face your daily schedule!

So, one of my personal spiritual practices that I benefit from most, is the intentional practice of using music as praise for the wonder of creation and God's activity within it. And, I invite all of you to try it for yourselves this week and see if using music as a holy interruption might work for you, too.

Pick two of your favorite songs –songs that inspire you and lift you up! Find time in your day (perhaps in your car on your way home after work?) to play these songs back to back. Do this someplace where you can crank up the volume and sing along, as loud as you can, with great gusto! Maybe really let yourself go and try a couple dance steps along with the singing! Take notice of how doing this simple and fun practice changes your mood for the rest of your day or evening. Can you feel God's presence with you? Does it change how you face the rest of your schedule for the day? Does it change the way you greet others?

Enjoy your week! Amen.