What Is A Song?

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What is a song anyway? What accounts for the power of a song to mediate an experience of intimacy that is palpable if a word shy of describable? A song is a relationship between notes. One note is a sound; wherever two or three notes are gathered, there is, or at least is the possibility of, a song. One note is torture; wherever two or three notes are gathered there is the possibility of pain or ecstasy.

A Song Is A Sign

A song, in other words, is a sign that all reality is *communitarian.* God is not singulatarian; He is trinitarian. Reality, including reality's source, cannot be reduced to something simpler than relationship.

The quantum physicists tell us this may even be true of matter at its most basic expression. Experimental data suggests that a particle, say an electron, cannot be determined to exist until there is an observer observing the electron. Until then it is indeterminate, a potentiality. This is why the quantum physicists sometimes sound more like philosophers or mystics than like scientists. *In this sense, all worship is an experience of community.*

At the heart of what the Vineyard movement is, or more to the point, at the heart of what God is doing through the Vineyard movement, is a song: an intimate worship song, sung with others, mediating an experience that is palpable if a word shy of describable. Our task in the Vineyard is more than simply to make and sing more of these intimate worship songs (though may they multiply). Our task is also to understand these songs and what the Father is doing through them, and go wherever it is they are leading us.

A Song Is A Siren

These songs are calling us to come into a realm that is communitarian. The Church is, of course, a community. Even when we sing these songs alone, we do so as members of this body. However, these songs are communitarian in another, less obvious sense. They call us into a spiritual or heavenly realm that is by nature communitarian.

I would beg your indulgence as I share what has been going on when I pray as of late. Talking about such things shouldn't be done lightly, because it's talking about what is going on behind closed doors. I only do so because it's necessary to make the point. "Lately" for me began in 1999, when my father died and I went into a mild depression. I felt whipped, and my energy for prayer was about shot. As a result, I slipped into a couple of practices I hadn't known in depth before: silence and saying my prayers in the old way of the church called fixed hour prayers.

First came the silence, for which I noticed a craving if not an ease in practicing. During one time of silence I felt the Holy Spirit do something completely unexpected: He introduced me to myself, as in, "Ken, meet Ken." It was so odd, so embarrassing (by age 50, one would think we would have met already) that I didn't mention it to anyone for three years. It was also so real, and I couldn't forget even if I didn't understand. The fact is, to be human is not simply to have a self, but to be self-aware – to have a self and a sense of self. All of this implies the necessity of having a relationship with one's own self. As Gerard Manley Hopkins told himself in a poem of his, "Let me be to my sad self hereafter kind." This line of Hopkins is implicit in Torah and Jesus when they say, "Love your neighbor as your self."

Next, added to the silence during this low energy time, came fixed hour prayer – not because fixed hour prayer was the rage, or because I got the liturgical bug, but because my own prayers were so weak. Weak or not, I wanted to keep praying so I used the prayers of others that I found in *The Divine Hours* (a manual for fixed hour prayer.) The prayers are comprised of those songs called the Psalms, the Lord's Prayer (his before it was ours) and the rather humbling practice of saying set prayers; prayers, like hot songs that we sing, crafted by someone else but when working, speak for us all. I've been doing that for about three years now, more or less, but now more and more (most days seven times a day in fact). Last year I hit a tipping point: I stumbled into praying for others everyday, but without a specific agenda... simply lifting up loved ones by name before the presence of Love. I found, through this simple practice, an experience of being gently pickled in love, which brought me to prayer more and more and got me waking up earlier.



A Song Is A Place

I was then beginning to experience my morning prayers and heart songs as something less like a mental activity and something more like going somewhere. I noticed that the primary biblical metaphors for prayer, for worship, even for the kingdom of God, are place metaphors: the realm of the kingdom, the temple, the heavenly realms of St. Paul. I heard a contemporary metaphor for the spiritual realm that made sense of my experience. It came from author Phyllis Tickle, who said the Internet, as a "non-locative place," is an analogy for the spiritual realm. Of course! The Internet: "inter" meaning "between" and inferring relationship; "net" meaning "the whole" created by the relationships. The Internet is not a computer, but a relationship between computers. The Internet is also a place that we go ("going online") through a portal, the computer. By analogy, we enter this other "non-locative place," the heavenly realm, through the portal of Jesus, the Lord of an online community, so to speak.

This analogy helped me to make sense of what in heaven's name the spiritual realm actually is. It is communitarian. It can't be reduced to anything less than relationship, like a song is a relationship between notes and not just one note in isolation. This realm burst from everlasting being into everlasting being with the Trinity, a community of persons. It is now, for those who will enter, a communion of saints and a fellowship in the Holy Spirit, who is the fire in the gap between persons.

Recently, to see if anyone else was having this "place" experience, I asked the church I attend (Vineyard Church of Ann Arbor) to send me emails describing their experience of prayer. Apparently lots of people were experiencing prayer in this way. I received reports of prayer as a place – an open field, a garden, a cave, though often not so vividly geographic, but a place nevertheless that felt like a place in the presence of Jesus. Most of those who emailed me about this "place" experience of prayer added, "I've never told anyone about this before. It sounds so weird." A friend of mine, the wife of a Vineyard pastor, told me that when she first became a Christian as she prayed she experienced being in a garden, sitting on a bench next to Jesus. Someone told her this sounded "new-agey," so she told Jesus she couldn't keep coming there. She didn't for the next twenty years, to the diminishment of her prayer experience. I suggested she read St. Paul, and that "paradise" means "walled garden. " As long as he wasn't passing out crystals, it probably wasn't “new agey.”

A Song Is A Mystery

I think what's been happening beneath the radar, but is gathering steam, is a resurgence of what used to be called (unhelpfully, I think) mysticism. This word is, in fact, very Christian if St. Paul, the apostle John, Theresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and I suspect, Jonathan Edwards were Christians. It's the other side of the coin that is Pentecost. It's God's Spirit poured out on all flesh; the door to the kingdom, the heavenly realms swung open wide, and the riff raff entering in, the old and young, the men and maidens, singing this new mystery of song together.

Our task is to enter in and get a lay of this land. We are to do so leaving the door open for whomever else would wish to enter. This is not now (if it ever was) just for those cloistered in a convent or monastery, like the "mystics" of old. This reality, and the experience of this reality, is simply going into the Father's house. The Father is calling the prodigals home in droves, along with the unclean, unwanted and the non-religiously privileged – who continue to delight Him by taking the Kingdom by storm. There has to be room in the house, and in us, for all of them to squeeze in, too.

It's time, in short, not only to sing these songs, but to understand what the songs are telling us, and to go where they bid us to go.



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