

January 9, 2010

Epiphany

I never really “zoned in” on the word before. And now thinking about its definition I know that my epiphanies come most often when I listen to or sing music. It is always in my heart and mind. From the beginning music has always been a part of my life. My mother played the piano and my sister and I sang duets from an early age. Later in high school my friend Patty joined us to form a trio. My wish in the high school annual was “to make people happy and to be happy myself, preferably thru music.”

My husband and I moved to Juanita in 1945 and became involved in the Juanita Improvement Club where I met Margaretta (Leen) Reid. After hearing me sing at a program she said that I needed to come to her church in Kirkland as they had a great choir and a fantastic choir director. Florence Gildow was the director and the church was Kirkland Congregational.

To me music expresses our deepest feelings far more powerfully than words alone. Music adds so much to the power of scripture, preaching, prayer and sacraments. Most great anthems are settings of scripture. Einstein said it well: “Music is the supreme art which says what words cannot do alone.”

In the book “The Mozart Effect” Don Campbell states that from time immemorial sound and music have been associated with the creation of the universe itself. In the West, the gospel tells us that in the beginning was the Word. In Greek, “logos” means not only “word” but also “sound.” Music in the ancient world was a mysterious and powerful tool for attuning the mind and body.

Music was also a part of church life in biblical times. In the Psalms there are many references to singing and music. Some historians credit David with organizing temple music.

In researching for a sermon I gave in 2002 in our “Journey” series I stated that I had been collecting writings about music most of my life. As a choir member for so many years I wrote a statement using some of my thoughts with other ideas and came up with a definition of a choir.

“A choir is a group which comes together as caring and giving people who happen to have musical talent. They give the congregation a spiritual uplift. We become nearer to God as we lift up our voices to praise what is good and loving on the earth.”

God gave music another power: the power to heal. Many physicians are finding that music used with conventional therapies can help heal the sick. Some studies show that it can lower blood pressure, and respiration rates, thus lessening physiological responses to stress. Music therapy is also used for neurological disorders. Doctor Sacks whose work led to the book and movie, “Awakening” reported that many patients suffering from this disorder who cannot talk or move are often able to sing and sometimes even dance to music.

A novel by Pat Conroy expresses well why I believe music is our magical link to God.

“Without music, life is a journey through a desert that has not heard the rumor of God in music’s sweet harmony. I had all the proof I needed of a God who held the earth together between the staffs where the heavens lay.... Look at the stars sometimes--they are not only notes, they are music.”

Many people have expressed the importance of music. Woodrow Wilson called it the common bond between races and nations.

Author, Norman Cousins described a visit he had with Pablo Casals at his home in Puerto Rico shortly after his 90th birthday.

“The renowned cellist suffered from rheumatoid arthritis, emphysema and other ailments, including swollen hands and clenched fingers. Cousins explained that he witnessed a miracle as Casals

struggled to the piano to play for him. It was a transformation as his fingers settled on the keys and began music by Bach.

He played with great sensitivity and control---humming as he played--then said as he placed his hand on his heart--"Bach speaks to me here."

Music lifts my spirits, gives me great joy and also makes me realize that I have been given a special gift from God.

AMEN