

This last October I had the great blessing of participating in a mission trip to Hungary with three other church musicians, all in support of a missionary friend that is working with the Gypsies in a town called Pecs. These gypsy people have been outcasts, not only in the Hungarian culture, but across Europe. They have no homeland and are seen as a burden on the societies among which they now live. There are separate villages for them, established by the government. Most employers would not think of hiring a gypsy. I can only imagine that the situation is similar to that of the United States long before the civil rights movement.

There is quite a story to tell about these gypsy people, in particular the youth I encountered, and I certainly hope we as a congregation are able to hear that story over time. But today I would like to share with you a few thoughts about the music of these wonderful people. While teaching one day in a school, a gypsy school, we had the privilege of hearing a group of 20 or so students sing. Their sound was like nothing I had ever heard. Not particularly pleasing to hear- everyone sang on the same pitch, at the same octave. Loud. and fast. The boys sang at the top of their range and the girls in the strongest part of their chest voice. But I noticed each time they sang, throughout the week I spent with them, there was

never a feeling of “practice” or “rehearsal”. Each time they sang, they carried meaning in their song. Yes, there was certainly improvement from repetition...familiarity was establishing proficiency. But no one ever discounted what they already knew, nor did they stop their expression through their music.

As you can imagine, this started me thinking. Our pattern here, in music or sports or business, is to rehearse or practice or refine, to continue to perfect something, and then take it to the listener or ball game or market place. We have a very distinct line between what is meant for public consumption and what is just “practice.” And I thought “why do we separate?” Why can’t our choir rehearsals be just as much a time of worship as our Sunday mornings? Why don’t we give 100% at a spring scrimmage? At our best we are striving for perfection, though we will never reach it. At our worst, perhaps we are simply making excuses for our actions, being lazy and only half committed to our task.

I was convinced that we needed to re-tool our approach to life. Everyday should be filled with our best. We should be committed to our tasks and glorifying God in all we do. My mind bordered on monkhood for all of Westminster and even the usptate. We need not reserve our best for Sunday mornings- our best music, our best

clothes, our “holy” persona. Besides, God is always with us- day by day, hour by hour “Lord, you are near me..when I sleep, when I wake.” Should we not be attentive? Why should we not respond? Shouldn’t we find fulfillment in everyday, and shouldn’t we seek God in everything that we do?

But Jesus says to them “the sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the sabbath.”

“For six days you shall labor, but on the seventh you shall rest.”

“Come unto me, all you that labor, and I will give you rest”

I don’t think we are talking about physical rest here. Even if we are one of those people that work 10 or 12 hours a day, either out of necessity or addiction, we have plenty of time for physical rest. But we fill that time up as well with social appointments or family obligations or extra things that we have a hard time saying “no” to. I’m sure many of you would like to have a nickel for every time you were expected to be in two places at once. Yes, these things are our labors, as good and worthy as they may be, and they wear us out. We

become fatigued and don't sleep enough. Our bodies begin to object and we are not well, we don't look well, and even those things that we have to do, we can't do well. Some people take "mental health days" from work- a sick day to get away from it all and kind of control-alt-delete themselves from a hectic schedule. A week at the beach, an afternoon drive in the mountains, a few hours on the back porch. But I don't think God is simply calling us to take a "mental health day" one of every seven days. I don't think we are getting a little pat on the back from God, as if to say "you've been working hard, why don't you take a day off!" No, I believe God has created us with a need for something different. Our rest in God.

My eyes have been opened over the past year to something I often took for granted- I guess because of my particular brand of music I have always found myself in churches that have acoustically rich sanctuaries. Usually this comes in a building that has an aesthetic appeal, though not always. Many church buildings are not like this, and in the day of expensive buildings materials and other less expensive solutions, and may I say a great dilemma as to where to spend money, I certainly understand why. In this sanctuary we are aware of the acoustic and aesthetic detail- and I have been with quite

a few people (sound contractors, organ builders, visitors) as they enter the building for the first time. Recently a visitor, a youth actually, said to me “when you walk in this place, there is no doubt you are in church.” True- with a giant cross hanging above the chancel, you know where you are. Even as we worshipped in the fellowship hall for a year, a large silver cross told all who entered that this is the house of God, and it is Christ who is worshipped here. It is the house of God- and surely the Lord is in this place. Our Lord who loves us in times of doubt, who holds us in trouble and sorrow, and who shouts with us in times of joy and excitement!

When we know that we have come into the presence of God, and when we can sing of God’s greatness and love, and when we can say together “in Jesus Christ We Are forgiven” then we can lay aside our labors and find our rest in God alone.

In that peace and rest, may we see God’s work that has been hidden by our busyness. May we see the miracles that we have covered up with our production. In these great hours of worship, may we find in our souls a new song for our God.