

September 8, 2019  
Rev. Jane Florence  
Title: "Heart Song"  
Text: Psalm 150



I was privileged to spend the summer of 2014 in Ireland on a clergy renewal sabbatical grant through the Lily Foundation. While on the Emerald Island, I toured museums, stood in awe of Irish vistas, strolled the beaches, clambered over many stone ruins and, of course, visited a few Irish pubs- every night- just to play my bodhran, mind you. I enjoyed the traditional Celtic music whether in informal jam sessions or in professional shows. A lively tune brought strangers together in robust chorus of "Wild Rover" or "Galway Girl" , and a somber ballad drew us into a quiet remembrance of the tragic Irish history of poverty and division.

On one pub evening, I watched as the two-piece band set up and began their show. The first minute revealed their talent. The guitar picked and strummed difficult patterns while the accordion bellowed an intricate accompaniment. The duo added their voices in perfect harmony. However, as I sat there listening, I knew something was wrong. The beautiful music just wasn't holding my interest. I found myself looking around the room. I could see the other patrons had disengaged from the music and returned to their table conversations as well. Slowly, the tables emptied. I pondered the problem. The musicians were playing everything correctly, and they were singing just fine, but when I look at their faces, I realized they were like stone statues I had seen etched in the ancient ruins. Their eyes were dull as they stared off into the distance. The fingers plucked the right strings and pressed the right keys, but the music was lifeless. Their hearts clearly were not in their music, and heartless music does not stir the soul.

Biblical scriptures speak often of the dangers of a 'hardened heart.' A hardened heart is one that is closed to the Divine wisdom within. A hardened heart is closed to receive the joy and love woven into each day. A hardened heart is closed to share in the suffering of others. A hardened heart does not stir the soul.

When I applied for the grant that funded my renewal leave, the foundational question of the application asked, "what will make your heart sing?" The Lily Foundation invests in heart songs because they know how easily it is for any of us to get so bogged down with our work that we forget to let our heart sing, and they know how important it is for us all, personally, professionally, and spiritually, to live with open hearts that sing. In answering the question for the grant, I wrote that diving deep into Celtic spirituality, immersing myself in Irish music and seashores, and throwing pottery makes my heart sing. So that is what I did for three months.

One of the places I chose to work on pottery was a studio just south of Dublin. I researched various Irish potters online while I was planning my trip. When I read the website of this particular potter, it said and I quote, "Does music make your heart sing? Do you have a favorite mug? Do you ever walk barefoot through the grass to feel the earth's energy? Objects carry energy. If we tune in we can feel them. I make pots to carry healing energy." The description sounded perfect for my sabbatical quest.

In my time there, I did work on pottery skills, but even more important, I also worked on my heart song. The potter was also a spiritual healer. The first day we met, before we dug into the clay, we shared a cup of tea and got to know one another a bit. He complemented me on my aura. He told me that I have lots of energy about my head and down through my arms. He asked me if I did a lot of head work, and if I cared for others. I was startled and somewhat pleased at his quick assessment of my vocation as pastor/preacher. Then he said, "but your

heart... it is not so open. Your energy flows out for others, but you don't receive as well as you give. Your heart is guarded." Wow, he knew all that over a cup of tea!

A closed heart is protected; it's safe. It's not vulnerable to pain. Some of us learned to protect our hearts pretty early on in life. Some of us have gotten good at sheltering our emotion from the world. But I was on a journey that summer to let my heart sing, so I began to do some heart work between turns of the pottery wheel.

A few days later, I was walking around Glendalough. I came upon a lake so peaceful it mirrored the mountains surrounding it and tears filled my eyes at the wonder and beauty. I touched the clear water and remembered the water of my birth and baptism and the water of my body today were the same waters of the earth cycling through the atmosphere since time began and awe filled my being realizing that I was one with this lake. I saw the rough bark on the trees, and I ask permission of it to touch it. I lay down flat on my back in the middle of a green pasture where sheep grazed beside still waters, and my heart sang the 23rd Psalm. The Holy was so very near. The first lesson of open heartedness is awareness that the Holy is so very near always. We can know it- if we allow it into our awareness. If we risk it, if we participate in life with open hearts in all we do, in work and in play, the world is holy and all in it.

An old story tells of three stonecutters who were working side by side one day. Someone asked the first man what he was doing. The first replied with much grumbling about sore back and aching hands, 'I am stuck here in the hot sun piling these rocks one on top of the other.' The second man was asked, "what are you doing?" He didn't look up. He just kept on hammering the rocks while he said, 'I am making a living.' The third one was asked, " what are you doing?" He looked up with a visionary gleam in his eyes and a beaming smile and said, 'I am building a cathedral that will praise my God for all ages.'

They were all doing the same task with their hands, but their hearts were so different. One was working in anger and resentment. One was just doing a job to get paid. The third man had included his heart in his labor. He could see beyond a stone and mortar wall of his hands. His presence brought life energy to stone walls as he could hear the prayers that would someday rise in that place. He could hear the psalms that would someday be sung in that place. His work was nourished by his heart; His soul was nourished by his work of psalms. He was living psalm 150:

Praise the Lord! Praise God with trumpet sound with lute and harp  
with tambourine and dance with strings and pipe!  
Praise with calculator and stethoscope.  
Praise with shovel and trowel.  
Praise with data sheets and lesson plans.  
Sing Praise with all your life.

We all have the opportunity to make music each day. Some of us sing in the choir; some of us sing in the shower, but all of us can let our hearts sing. Whether we are a musician or a teacher or an accountant or construction worker or a student or anything else, we are composing our heart song each day. We add our notes to the symphony of God's universe. We add our song to the singing of the stars.

We are thankful for our musicians who bring life and sound and energy into worship. We are thankful for their songs and instruments which fill our hearts in praise and thanksgiving.

We are thankful for each singer and tambourine shaker and drummer and trumpeter and flute and violin and harp or bell note that sounds in this place.

Scripture is filled with songs and the instruction to sing out in praise and thanksgiving. Today's song of praise was for all creation. It uses metaphor for water, sky, trees, mountains, all sing praise. Stars, rain and wind, all sing praise, whales and birds and creatures great and small, all sing praise each in their own way. The trees don't sing the same as the mountains and the whales don't sing the same as the birds; each one has a song of praise imbedded in their core. Each one in different ways sings praise. We all might not sing in the choir, but we all can sing praise in our own way.

We are thankful for those who literally bring music to our worship. We all, each and every one here is part of the melody of this community. We share in the music of life and the song of justice. We participate in the vibration of God's Spirit and the melody of life, and we each do so in our own way.

Community helps us to find our heart song expression: leading a Sunday class or small group discussion, teaching the children, feeding the homeless or building habitats for humanity, serving the hungry, reading scripture, greeting at doorways, leading the youth.

We gather as community to add our heart song to the whole. We do so each in our own way of in serving one another and God's world in a harmony of praise. There are no stone eyes etched in dead statues here. You serve with eyes filled with awe and wonder. You serve with hearts open to share and receive Holy Love.

Though all our happy feet and busy hands and quiet souls and prayerful moments, though our care for one another and all our human family and all the earth, we join our gifts and hearts and make music that touches the world and in our music, in so very many ways, God is glorified.

May it be so.