

**Rideau Park United Church, Ottawa**  
**Sunday, June 2, 2019 – Elizabeth Bryce**

**Readings: Psalm 96**  
**1 John 4:7-12, 19**

*A **Hymn-Sing** service, inspired by  
John Wesley's Directions for Singing  
(found on page 720 in Voices United)*

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*Rule 1: Learn these tunes before you learn any others;  
afterwards learn as many as you please.*

**Hymn: 315 VU – Holy, holy, holy Lord God almighty**

Introduction to the Service:

That hymn, which we just sang, was the opening hymn sung every Sunday at the church where I grew up, at least until we started using the red Anglican/United hymn books. Was it the same for anybody else here? NOT coincidentally, it was the first hymn in the old hymnary: #1 in the book and #1 in our hearts my mother used to say. She grew up in a Baptist church, where they probably still sing that hymn to begin worship every Sunday, or at least they did the last time I was there.

Today we are doing a hymn-singing service, and I've based it on John Wesley's Directions for Singing, found in the back section of our red Voices United. Sharon is going to help me by reading out the directions throughout the service. Anyways, I love the first rule – John Wesley tells his congregation to learn a few simple tunes **well** before they start adding a lot of other tunes. Wesley knew that there's nothing like a familiar hymn to engage a congregation in worship – most of the hymns we sing today are ones that you might know well.

*Rule 2: Sing them exactly as they are printed here,  
without altering or amending them at all;  
and if you have learned to sing them otherwise  
unlearn it as soon as you can!*

A Time for all God's Children

*"Unlearn it as soon as you can!"*

Did you ever have to unlearn something? I have had to unlearn a lot of attitudes that I was exposed to growing up – racism and homophobia, gender roles and ethnic stereotypes – they were all around me and I absorbed them. It wasn't till I started meeting people who broke down those prejudices that I began to "unlearn" them. Some of those prejudices influence our hymns too.

This is the way I learned to sing some verses of **Jesus Loves Me:**

*2 Jesus loves me he who died  
heaven's gate to open wide.  
He will wash away my sin,  
let his little child come in. [Refrain]*

*3. Jesus loves me, loves me still,  
though I'm very weak and ill;  
from his shining throne on high,  
Comes to watch me where I lie.*

*4. Jesus loves me, he will stay  
Close beside me all the way;  
If I love him when I die  
He will take me home on high.*

Images of death and illness, sins and a gatekeeper who keeps non-Christians out, these are images that we are not really comfortable using in church, especially with children. And so we have to unlearn them, like John Wesley said. And even though these are not the words we memorized when we were five years old: we are going to sing the updated version:

**Hymn: 365 VU - Jesus loves me**

*Rule 3: Sing all. See that you join with the congregation  
as frequently as you can.  
Let not a slight degree of weakness or weariness hinder you.  
If it is a cross to you, take it up, and you will find it a blessing.*

Reflection:

Lots of people think they can't sing ... they think that no one wants to listen to them, and so they just listen to the voices of the people around them. But studies show that people who sing together – in a choir or a church congregation – actually have better mental health than those who don't. God doesn't care whether you sing like Pavarotti or croak like a frog. As it says in the book of Psalms "Sing to God ALL the earth."

John Wesley suggested that some of our voices were perhaps **our cross to bear**. I think the cross of Jesus is not so much about suffering (suffering through the voice that cannot carry a tune) – it's about having courage. Courage to stand up even in the face of opposition or criticism. So sing out! Have courage! God actually wants to hear your voice too! Now we sing about the cross we carry together:

**Hymn: 561 VU – Take up your cross, vs 1 and 2**

*Rule 4: Sing lustily and with good courage.  
Beware of singing as if you were half dead, or half asleep;  
But lift up your voice with strength.  
Be no more afraid of your voice now,  
nor more ashamed of its being heard,  
than when you sung the songs of Satan.*

Reflection:

I'm not sure I ever sang the songs of Satan, and maybe you haven't either. But I think you know what Wesley meant. John Wesley was a big believer in **conversion**, even if you were already Christian. He believed that if we listened to our hearts' true desire, we would find our way to God. So when you do, said Wesley, sing out, from the very bottom of your heart. Sing your new life with just as much passion as you sought your former obsessions.

I was once in a worship service where the music leader was really into contemporary worship. Most of the music that was presented by the praise band at the front were not songs that the traditional congregation knew – that was obvious from the pews at the back. Then they began a prayer that used the last 2 lines of this next hymn as a kind of response: “bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more... feed me till I want no more.” And they were supposed to stop there, to let the prayer continue, but the congregation just kept singing – on to the second verse, all by heart (Open now the crystal fountain...) Even the back pews woke up and joined in! They hijacked the order of service and they expressed confidence, not just in the song, but in their lifelong faith! Eventually the band gave up and joined in. Whenever I read John Wesley's direction to sing “lustily” that's the kind of singing, a heartfelt moment of faith that I think of.

**Hymn: 651 VU – Guide me O Thou Great Jehovah, verses 1-2**

*Rule 5: Sing modestly.  
Do not bawl so as to be heard above  
or distinct from the rest of the congregation,  
that you may not destroy the harmony;  
but strive to unite your voices together,  
so as to make one clear melodious sound.*

Reflection:

I chose the reading from the first letter of John, because the last verse, verse 19, is said to be the verse that John Wesley based many of his sermons on. He believed so profoundly in God's love, that he could not understand how a community of God's people wouldn't reflect love in their life together. “<sup>19</sup>We love because God first loved us.” John Wesley knew well that followers of Jesus are not all the same. We do not necessarily sing in UNISON – therefore we must sing in harmony.

We don't all play the same role, or have the same interests and talents, but together we can make beautiful music. I chose the next hymn because it uses some of the most beautiful harmonies I have ever sung, and it celebrates our diversity, working together.

**Hymn: 580 VU – Faith of our Fathers, verses 1-2**

*Rule 6: Sing in time.  
Whatever time is sung, be sure to keep with it.  
Do not run before nor stay behind it;  
but attend close to the leading voices,  
and move therewith as exactly as you can;  
and take care not to sing too slow.  
This drawling way naturally steals on all who are lazy;*

*and it is high time to drive it out from us,  
and sing all our tunes just as quick as we did at first.*

**Offering Response: 191 MV – What can I do?**

*Rule 7: Above all, sing spiritually  
Have an eye to God in every word you sing.  
Aim at pleasing him more than yourself,  
or any other creature. In order to do this  
attend strictly to the sense of what you sing,  
and see that your heart is not carried away with the sound,  
but offered to God continually;  
so shall your singing be such as the Lord will approve here,  
and reward you when he cometh in the clouds of heaven.*

**Reflection:**

I don't think John Wesley would ever have made it so far as the founder of the Methodist Church, if it hadn't been for his brother, Charles Wesley. Brother Charles was a musician and a hymn writer, and he wrote more than 600 hymns for the Methodist movement, many of which are still sung today in all kinds of churches. Hark the herald angels sing, Jesus Christ is risen today, Love divine, all loves excelling – no wonder the Methodist church attracted so many believers.

Steve and I rely greatly on the amazing musical gifts that we have here at Rideau Park, we depend especially on our music staff to make us sound good. So I couldn't let John Wesley take over the service today without mentioning Charles. We are going to sing one of his hymns, it's not one I often choose, but it reflects making God's love for us and others the first priority in all that we do

**Hymn: 213 VU – Rejoice the Lord is King**