

LET OUR SONG BE HEARD-ROMANS 6:1-14
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Good morning, once again I am thankful to be preaching this morning. Many of you know that it doesn't take very much for me to get excited about something, and preaching is certainly one of those things.

Preaching is more than just something I get excited about. I consider it a true honor and a humbling opportunity that I'm able to open God's word with you this morning. Recently I've been thankful for so many of you, how you have offered Krista and I your advice, wisdom encouragement, and above all else your friendship. Something I have learned about our community here at Spokane Friends is that it is a place where you can be truly known, and welcomed. I have loved sharing with our friends here in Spokane how awesome it is to have found a church home. I just feel like I can be me when I'm here, and that is a difficult thing to find.

By that I mean that this is a place where you can feel safe allowing people to see who you really are. Here we have grasped the reality that Christ calls all people to himself, that everyone is welcome in the kingdom of God. This is something we should celebrate about our church community. When people ask me about my church one of the first things I tell them is that at Spokane Friends you don't have to put on your Sunday best. For people who have been a part of a church they immediately understand what I mean. For those who haven't, I usually explain it like this "at my church you can allow the person that you are on the inside to show on the outside, you don't have to pretend to be someone you're not." I don't feel the need to act a certain way here and I'm so thankful for that. Genuineness is something that we do very well here, it is one of our strengths and something that we should celebrate. That is what my sermon is about this morning, celebrating our relationship with Christ, celebrating our communal life together and letting our song of faith be heard in the places we work, go to school, and in our neighborhoods.

One of my favorite professors from my time as a student at George Fox is a man named Irv Brendlinger.. He is perhaps best known for driving an old diesel Mercedes which he runs off of used veggie oil. If you have ever ridden behind a car like that you have experienced the odd sensation of driving behind a car that smells distinctly like French fries and Fritos.

We all have people in our lives that have helped form us into who we are today, and Irv is certainly one of those people for me. If there is something that I have learned from Irv it is that our best friends are also the people who challenge and push us most, and it is important to cultivate those honest relationships. Irv also has the interesting tendency to refer to some of his favorite authors as friends. If you didn't know Irv you would assume that he has lived for hundreds of years. He will talk about getting to know people like Martin Luther and C.S. Lewis, as if he hung out with them on Sundays after church. What he means is that he has gotten to know them by reading their written works. Irv introduced me to many new friends during my time as his student. This morning I want to introduce you to one of my very good friends, his name is Calvin Miller.

Calvin Miller is best remembered for writing *The Singer*. This book retells the story of Jesus' death and resurrection with a distinctly musical focus. In Miller's stories Jesus is known as the Troubadour and the Singer, a great travelling minstrel who sings wherever he goes. His

song is the star song, the gospel. When he sings his star song there is healing, wholeness, and salvation, it is a song which he teaches to others and invites them to sing themselves. The star song heals the sick, raises the dead, brings forgiveness for sin and frees the oppressed. God the Father is known as **Earth Maker**, the one who formed the world and who first called Jesus as the **Troubadour** to sing his star song, the song of the gospel that brings freedom to the world. Satan is known as **World Hater**, he plays a silver pipe and plays a song of hate wherever he goes. His song brings agony, torment, oppression and anguish. It is this star song, the gospel, which our great Troubadour Jesus wants us to sing. The truth that Jesus as the son of God, came and lived among us as a human, he was crucified, buried and resurrected on the third day in order for us to have forgiveness from our sins and a restored relationship with God. If that isn't something worth singing about I don't know what is. This is the song that Jesus taught each of us when we chose to commit our lives to Him. Each of us brings to it a unique note, melody, or timbre, and the one you bring is essential. It is the song that we sing where there is darkness, anger, fear, prejudice and hate. It is this song which we must sing to the world, this song which must be heard. **Now more than ever, this song must be heard.**

I want to share with you one of my favorite passages from *The Singer*:

The Singer stopped. Beside the road he saw a brown eyed child. Her mouth was drawn in hard firm lines that could not bend to either smile or frown. Her sickness ate her spirit, devouring all the sparkle in her eyes.

Her legs misshapen as they were lay useless underneath the coarsest sort of cloth. The Singer knelt beside her in the dust and touched her limpid hand and cried. He drew the cloth away that hid her legs. He reached his calloused hand and touched the small misshapen foot.

"I too was born with scarred feet. See mine!" he said, drawing back the hem of his own robe. She seemed about to speak when the music of a silver pipe broke in the air around them. He had heard the pipe before.

Above them towered the World Hater. "I knew you'd come," he said. "You will, of course, make straight her twisted limbs?"

"I will, World Hater... but can you have no mercy? She's but a child. Can her wholeness menace you in any way? Would it so embarrass you to see her skipping in the sun? Why hate such little, suffering life?"

"Why chide me, Singer? She's Earthmaker's awful error. Tell your Father-Spirit he should take more time when he creates."

"No it is love which brings a thousand children into life in health. It is hate that cripples each exception to eternal joy. But why must you forever toy with nature to make yourself such ugly pastimes of delight?"

"I hate all the Father-Spirit loves. If he would only hate the world with me, I'd find no joy in it again. You sing. The only music that I know is the cacophony of agony that grows from roadside wretches such as these."

The child between them lay bewildered by their conversation. The Singer spoke again: “I’ll bring my song against your hate, against the bonds of human sins. And human tears will all subside when the Ancient Star-Song wins.”

The Hater raged and screamed above his crippled joy: “Sing health! If you must. Sing everybody’s but your own. I soon will have your song, likewise your life. Your great Star-Song is doomed to fall. You’ll groan to my kind of music. When I meet you at the wall.”

The Singer scooped the frightened child into his arms. He sang and set her in the sunny fields and thrilled to watch her run. The world was hers in a way she’d never known. The butterfly-filled meadows danced her eyes alive and drew her scurrying away.

And others came!

Untouchables with bandages heard the healing song and came to health: The crippled and the blind. Sick of soul, Sick of heart, Sick of mind. Everywhere the music went, full health came.

I love the interaction between Jesus and Satan in this section, especially where it says “I’ll bring my song against your hate, against the bonds of human sins. And human tears will all subside when the Ancient Star-Song wins.”

This is the song that must be sung in our time. The reality that Jesus Christ came as a human was crucified and on the third day rose again offering all of us the chance to have a relationship with Him and in doing so conquering death and the power of sin over us. How awesome is that? Can I get a come on? All throughout the year, we participate in singing this song, in sharing our faith and relationship with Christ with others. Christ is changing and transforming us and we need to let our lives show that to the people around us. The work of God within us should be evident to others. The gospel is a song worth singing, and a song that needs to be heard. Our world is in desperate need of our song. We must sing it to those in power who will not protect the vulnerable. We must sing it to those who wish to divide the community of faith.

The book of Romans builds a wonderful metaphor for how we are to offer ourselves as instruments of righteousness who sing and play out God’s presence in our world. Romans 6:1-14 from the NIV reads:

¹What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

²By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶For we know that our old self was crucified with him

so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—⁷ because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

The apostle Paul exhorts us to offer ourselves as instruments of righteousness, because we have been made alive in Christ, and because we are free. That is something worth celebrating, and worth showing others. All of you are instruments of God's righteousness, who participate in playing the song of the gospel in our world. Now some of you may say, Jon how can I be an instrument of righteousness? if I'm an instrument I'm one who has quite a few dents and dings, I've been through so much hardship how can God play his song through me? I miss notes, how can I be worthy of allowing Christ to work through me? To all of us I would say, God isn't looking for perfect instruments, God is looking for you exactly as you are. Christ needs you to sing the song of the gospel, even if your voice cracks, or if you forget a note, or sometimes sing out of key. In the body of Christ there are no perfect members, everyone belongs and brings their own sound to the song. **We at Spokane Friends know this better than most!**

We sing this song when we choose to serve one of our neighbors, who we know needs a helping hand. We sing this song when we share with another person how Christ has made a difference in our life. We sing this song when we allow our actions to reflect our faith in Christ. We sing this song when we choose to see our work as ministry, rather than just a place we collect a paycheck. We sing this song when we allow our relationship with Christ to permeate all aspects of our being, and others see and witness it.

As I was preparing for this Sunday I began to think of the people who first introduced me to Jesus, and who taught me how to sing this song of the gospel. The person who taught me most about being a follower of Christ was my high school soccer coach Mr. Marshall. Mr. Marshall was a person whose faith was so evident in everything he did. His whole life seemed to sing "Jesus cares about you." He saw me as Jesus saw me, a person who was made by God, a person who had value, meaning, and purpose. His faith was evident in his work as a middle school P.E. teacher, it was evident in his work as a soccer coach, and it was evident in his role as a mentor for so many young people like me. I've shared this before, but I was never the most gifted athlete. But he saw something within me, the potential that could be. I owe much of who I am today to him.

I wonder, for each of you who is the person who first noticed that potential in you? Who first noticed that you were not just a dinged up instrument.

Friends, as we journey through these challenging times, I want to ask each of you who do you know who needs to hear the song of the gospel? Will you choose to be the person to sing it

to them? There was someone who at some point in your life shared this song of the gospel with you; will you choose to follow their example? Will you sing about your relationship with Jesus only on Sunday mornings or will you take the truths that we sing about here into your week, sharing them with people around you who desperately need to hear them? Will you let your life cry out “I belong to Jesus, come and experience the freedom that is found within him!” When we declare this we do not condemn others, we liberate them.

Who may Christ be asking you to extend a simple invitation “would you like to come to church with me?” For some of you your relationship with Jesus began with that invitation. Let us go forth this week in boldness sharing Christ with our world, letting our light shine before all people and letting our song be heard.