

Eternity Sunday 2014¹
So that they may know hope
Ephesians 1:15-23

In our text for today, Eternity Sunday and Reign of Christ Sunday, we hear from the author of the letter to the Ephesians. In this letter we hear one small part of his vision for the church.

In verses 15-23 he prays a prayer of thanksgiving and intercession for those who have faith and love and trust and by this are part of the church that has gathered in Christ's name.

If we travel the centuries across a bridge to the church that gathers here in his name, we can hear this prayer as a prayer for us.

He prays that God will give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we will have the eyes of our hearts enlightened, so that we may know the hope to which we've been called, and also so that we may know the wealth and riches of our inheritance and the immeasurable greatness of God's power, the same power that God put to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at the right hand in the heavenly places – far above every rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but in the age to come.

There's a lot in this prayer of intercession. I invite you to hear it in a slightly different version.

The message version of the text puts it like this:

All this energy [he uses the word energy instead of power] issues from Christ: God raised him from death and set him on a throne in deep

¹ © Marilyn Zehr, 2014.

heaven, in charge of running the universe, everything from galaxies to governments, no name and no power exempt from his rule. And not just for the time being, but *forever*. He is in charge of it all, has the final word on everything. At the center of all this, Christ rules the church. The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence.

I want to focus on only a very small part of this text in Ephesians, but first I wanted the poetry of it's prayer to wash over you and I pray that the God, who called you to hope and to an inheritance and to share in this power or the energy that emanates from Christ, that this God will help you to hear what God wishes each of you to hear today.

Our God is personal like that – saving the world in which we live and over which Christ's rules, one at a time, and one community at a time drawing us individually and together, gathering us up individually and together into the hope and inheritance and power that is available to those who trust this to be true.

I want to share a story now about hope that may give us a glimpse into the hope to which all of us are called.

John and I watched a Netflix movie this week entitled *Alive inside: a Music and Memory project*. Have any of you seen it?

This film document's one man's desire to bring music to residents of Nursing Homes who suffer from Alzheimer's disease and other forms

of age related dementia. Many of us already know the power of music and especially the healing power of music and so at first I found myself nodding and asking, yes and you need to make a documentary about this because? And then I realized, that it was more than just any music, but personal music that had the most dramatic effect on the residents. When a person listened to his/her favourite music, we watched scene after scene where a person normally locked in the silent interior space of dementia literally woke up along with the recall of long dormant memories. Bodies and minds that had rested in an almost catatonic state, began to move, voices began to hum or sing, eyes widened, smiles or tears came and where speech was still possible – long forgotten stories resurfaced and were told with joy.

As one doctor in the film put it, “there is no medicine nearly as effective as a 40 dollar headset attached to a personal playlist, there is no other medicine with this kind of ability to bring a person back to themselves and their memories.

It wasn't until one of these awakenings was filmed and went viral on youtube that more and more people including young people have gotten involved in helping to discover and create personal playlists for lost and lonely seniors with dementia in Nursing homes and it has allowed others with the devastation of dementia to remain in their own homes with their families much longer.

It's an informative and beautiful film about the transformative power of music.

Our music memory, apparently, is stored at the back and base of the brain along with strong emotions and emotionally laden memories and

so is often not affected in the same way or as soon as other parts of the brain by the devastation of dementia. It's remarkable that we were created with a place inside that the devastation of Alzheimer's has trouble reaching. Music, emotional memory and our identity, the fingerprint of our autobiography, the unique life that is ours resides deep within and can be awakened by personal music.

It seems that here too resides our sense of the holy. I haven't had a chance to research this scientifically, so there may be other answers to this but this is why I say it, one of the individuals in the documentary who experienced this profound awakening quickly connected to his experience of love and of God.

With his eyes wide, his body still swaying to the music he had just been listening to and singing, a social worker asks him a simple question. He asks, "what does music do to you?"

and Henry, his name is Henry responds, " It gives me the feeling of love, romance, I figure right now, the world needs to come into music, singing. You've got beautiful music here, beautiful, lovely. And I feel a band of love, of dreams." After a pause, he continues, "The Lord came to me, made me holy, I'm a holy man, so he gave me these sounds." and then Henry begins to sing again. And all this verbose description is coming from a man who barely lifted his head off his hands before they brought him his music.

With the music the things that are returned to Henry are a sense of love, hope and holiness – and with these things a sense of identity, a sense of himself as a child of God, a holy man who has been given the gift of sounds – musical sounds.

One of the most profound gifts of our creator is that in the deep recesses of our brain reside all the things that make us uniquely human:

musical resonance,

deep emotion,

memories

and a sense of the holy. And when we are brought most deeply into ourselves by music or by prayer or whatever else might take us there we are also awakened simultaneously into communion with God and others. It seems to me that this must be where the eyes of our heart are enlightened. It's as if the deep heaven over which Christ rules is not only transcendent – out there - but deep within each one of us as well. This is one way to describe the hope to which we have been called. That each in our uniqueness belongs to God. And as we awaken to self and God we awaken to others.

But I think there's more. Let's look closely at Ephesians again. The author of Ephesians certainly wants the enlightenment of the eyes of our heart to reveal to us at least these three things:

first, the hope to which we've been called.

second, the riches of our inheritance among the saints (that is a new familial reality of belonging to the people of God)

and third, the immeasurable greatness of God's power - the same power that raised Christ from the dead and made him to rule over everything.

And why are we given these three things, first, this hope, second, this inheritance and third, this experience of immeasurable power that can raise the dead? These are the elements by which God through Christ built a church that is not peripheral to the world. As the Message says, the *world* is peripheral to the church

because

it is within and through this communion of hope-filled individuals that Christ speaks and acts and thereby fills the world with his presence. That's a powerful hope. Like Henry's awakening revealed to us in the movie, God has made us holy women and men and has given us sounds for the world.

On a day like today especially, Eternity Sunday, when we remember those who have gone before us, we most want to be aware of this hope that builds a church that has sounds for the world. This is both a difficult Sunday and a blessed Sunday. It is difficult because as we remember those we have loved and lost we may again become acquainted with the sadness of loss. It is a blessed Sunday because it is a Sunday of hope. Even though our loved ones are no longer with us, together we belong to Christ who rules over everything from deep heaven – everything including our lives and our deaths and through the immeasurable power of God has become the first fruits of those who will be raised.

Shortly we will participate in our flower ceremony where we name those whom we mourn. Before that we have a wonderful opportunity to

listen to Isaac Tiessen play Hayden's cello concerto in C major. When I asked Isaac about the music he will be playing he said that there isn't a lot of background on this piece of music, it was written for it's own sake. I don't know all that it has become for Isaac through the innumerable hours he has spent learning it, but for those of us who listen it has the potential to take us to this place of deep heaven where we are invited to know the hope to which we have been called. May it be so.