

Psalm 100

1 Samuel 16: 14 - 23

John 6: 1 - 14

Blessed, Broken, Shared

Rev. Elizabeth Macaulay

August 28, 2016



Christ United Methodist Church

Rochester, MN

Two weeks after Cooper and I were married I had surgery.

It was supposed to be an easy surgery - you know how such things are supposed to be easy things.

It turned out not to be an easy thing.

The surgery ended up taking a lot more time than expected and for the first time when talking with the anesthesiologist I didn't stress that I am a singer and a professional user of voice.

When I woke up from surgery finding I would need five days in the hospital I discovered another thing:

I had no voice.

I could rasp out enough to communicate a bit but the thing that Cooper calls cheating in my ministry - my ability to sing as well as speak - that always-there-for-me gift was silenced.

Before entering ministry I used my voice to sing in many places - the Big Top Chautauqua and churches and the Rittenhouse Inn and coffee houses and concert stages.

Through ministry my singing and speaking were so much of what I brought to ministry. It felt like they defined me. And so I waited for my voice to return.

And waited.

And it didn't. I was silenced and devastated.

New marriage. A church to shepherd. No voice.

I went to the specialists and they told me that I had a paralyzed vocal cord. It might or might not heal.

So they sent me to a voice therapist.

She was a woman a bit older than me who had an office that felt more like a voice studio and she gave me exercises and she talked with me about what my voice means to me.

At our third session or so she asked me about singing in public. Was I leading worship by singing as I have long done?

I looked at her aghast.

Of course I wasn't! My voice was awful! I could barely croak out a sermon. I wasn't going to inflict my horrible sounding voice on anyone.

I assured her I had not sung while leading worship.

Together in this place every Sunday we gather under the image of two men:

David, who healed through music and midwived praise through making a joyful noise.

Jesus, who taught his disciples that scarcity will keep a crowd and the world hungry.

Jesus who lived in our midst in order that we might truly and fully know our part in blessing and breaking and sharing God's abundance and grace.

Three years ago we were a scarcity - focused church.

Today, we know what it is to be alive and

we know what it is to believe that we cannot and will not keep from singing and

we know that the work of Jesus Christ will go on whether Andrew is in Florida or in Minnesota because

Andrew is God's instrument.

And you are God's instrument.

And we can't stop, won't stop making croaking sublime joyful inspired noise in gratitude for all that God has wrought.

Amen

“You’d better pray about that.”

That response took me back.

“Pray about it?” How was that?

“Yes”, she said.

“You stand before your congregation every Sunday and you encourage them to bring their whole selves before God and place it as offering and do you really want them to believe that the only offering God wants is a perfect one?”

You’d better pray about that.”

Her wisdom landed in that place of deep resonance that happens when you know someone or something has changed your life.

Because she was right. I talked and preached plenty about God wanting all of us - our lovely parts and the parts we’re not so sure about - but I wasn’t living it, not fully.

So the next Sunday I did one of the most vulnerable things I have ever done before a congregation.

I preached a croaky sermon. I told the story of my guru voice therapist.

And then I left the pulpit, stood front and center in the chancel and sang “How Can I Keep from Singing” a cappella.

And it was not lyrical. It was not lovely.

But oh, I so needed to ask the question: What would ever keep me from singing?

My own sense of being not enough?

God doesn’t care if I am Kathleen Battle. God cares that I am Elizabeth and that I bring my whole broken and blessed self to my life and witness.

Every Sunday worship here unfolds under the image of the musician David.

(You see him in the stained glass. The man with the harp)

Some three years ago a David-like healer came to this church.

Like the long-ago king Saul, Christ UMC was troubled.

It had gone through a long-feeling siege of many different music leaders that left it feeling unsure of itself and when churches are unsure about themselves they can sometimes forget why they exist.

She let me speak and then she looked at me with deep compassion and conviction and the medical specialist said to the pastor:

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Churches exist to give themselves away.

Churches exist to take the bits of God's abundance that may feel woefully small or unlovely or inadequate and bless them and break them and share them and what had happened over three years ago was the people whose joy it was to sing praise to God through voice and bell and song had begun to lose their sense of joy and praise.

And then David - I mean Andrew - appeared to sing the healing into the soul of this troubled church.

Andrew sat at the bench and coaxed music out of the old organ.

Andrew led us through the time of what he called "the toaster" and into the consecration of our new organ.

Andrew helped free the troubled soul of this church through laughing with us and loving our children and being unapologetically Andrew with a penchant for wild socks and a rolodex of physical symptoms that MIGHT cause a person to wonder about hypochondria and

the music the music the music he shared here in our midst -

It healed this church.

Somehow, Christine, you and your husband raised a man so gifted and generous that he played and led a church into remembering who they are.

Thank you for that.

Like our church years ago, the disciples of Jesus were convinced of scarcity.

Oh my gosh! So many people! So much hunger! Two fish! Five loaves! How could they ever feed so many with so little!

But Jesus knew the truth and that truth is this:

We have so much.

We heal each other when we believe together and live together the so much God has given us:

An organist and healer came from Florida and we became hungry and freed to sing God's praise.

Somehow you - each one of you - found your way to this church a week ago or fifty years ago and your prayers and your presence and your seeking to live the teachings of Jesus - those things! - have wrought a change in you in ways powerful and true and you know that you are no longer alone in the midst of the big hurts and celebrations of life:

The death of a partner or your child leaving for college. Whatever it is, you live in the company of a people who share the heart and hope and compassion of Jesus.

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