

## Sing A New Song!

On Sunday, we launched a sermon series exploring “the Genius of the Early Christians.” We began with a scripture passage that offers insight into worship in the early church.

1. Warm up question: Music is the sound track of our lives. Just hearing a song from our past can take us back to what we experienced during that time in life. What’s a song that, when you hear it, takes you back?
2. Bio-acoustic scientists tell us that we are surrounded by millions of sounds, most of which are beyond our hearing range. Music is generated by things like the electron shell of carbon atoms, earthworms, hydrogen atoms, whales, mollusks, and common flies.
  - a. What do you think all that music sounds like to God? How do you think it affects God? Why do you think God created a world that is so musical?
  - b. How does music affect you? What’s your favorite style of music? What’s your least favorite?
  - c. Tell us about a moment in your life when music really moved you.
  - d. Rev. Allan Boesak [BOO-sock], a South African freedom fighter says, “Hope teaches us to sing in those moments when music seems most inappropriate – knowing that if only we can sing it, it can become true.” What do you think he means? Do you agree?
3. We were made to sing, but we don’t all make the same kind of music. That’s where challenges arise when we gather in worship. And our differences don’t stop there. Depending on our personalities and past experience, most of us have a favorite worship style. Some prefer formal, others informal. Some prefer exuberant, others quietly reverent. The Corinthian Christians faced similar differences within their own cultural context. In a long chapter (I Corinthians 14), Paul gives us a glimpse into the challenges of early Christian worship. We won’t read the whole chapter, but let’s look some key points there.
  - a. Early churches were often cultural melting pots that drew together people who didn’t normally associate. We’re not just talking about personality differences, but differences of ethnicity, religious backgrounds, socio-economic status, and gender – kind of like LifeJourney Church. If you had the opportunity to worship in a place where everyone was like you (similar taste in music, similar church background, etc.), would you prefer that? Why or why not?
  - b. In verse 26, Paul criticizes the Corinthians. He says, “When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.” Apparently they had free-form worship services where, without any planning,

anyone could do (or say) whatever they wanted. Do you think you would have enjoyed being part of that? What kind of challenges do you think that created?

- c. One of the principal points of conflict in Corinth was over “speaking in tongues.” That term refers to the idea that, if we’re open to it, sometimes God’s Spirit will pray through us (and our supra-rational minds) with sounds and a language not known to humanity. In some instances, the person who prays, or someone who hears such a prayer, feels he/she has insight into what’s being said and “interprets” for everyone else. Have you ever witnessed people “speaking in tongues”? What were your impressions?
4. The attitude that seemed to dominate the Corinthian congregation was, “Worship is all about me and what I want.” Twice in Chapter 14 Paul emphasizes that in group worship “all things should be done for building up all the assembled people” (verses 5 and 26), so that “all may learn and all may be encouraged (verse 26).” When that’s the goal, the focus shifts from “me” to “us.” In a diverse congregation like Corinth (and LifeJourney), shifting to “us” requires a lot of give and take, and a lot of mutual love and respect.
    - a. For many of us, our preferences for style of sacred music and worship are deeply influenced by our past church experiences. What was the music and worship style of your past churches, and how has that affected your preferences?
    - b. In a diverse congregation like ours, when the focus shifts from “me” to “us,” our worship styles get woven together into something new and unique to us. What’s something we do in our worship services that you really like?
    - c. What’s something we do in our worship services that isn’t your cup of tea? Are you willing to joyfully embrace it for the sake of others?
    - d. What’s something we do in worship that challenged you at first, but now you’ve grown to love?
  5. Paul wanted the Corinthian worship services to get to a place that would model the beauty and diversity of the body of Christ and cause outsiders to say, “Wow! God is really among you! (Verse 25).” That’s where we want to get at LifeJourney. But getting there isn’t easy. Jeff shared two identical visions that folks in our congregation had during a worship transition eight years ago. In both visions, our congregation was seen making a long, tough slog up a mountain, until we finally reached a glorious mountain meadow. To Jeff, those visions suggested that we’ve been on a long journey to becoming the kind of worshipping congregation that will ultimately knock people’s socks off and draw so many to God that we will have to build a new sanctuary. Do you think we can get there? Do you think we’re getting close to that mountain meadow?