

The Sound of Truth

*"And so it was that David would take a harp and play it.
Then Saul would become refreshed and well,
and the distressing spirit would depart from him."*

I Samuel 16:23

A Sermon by Rev. Derek Elphick

INTRODUCTION

Imagine a world without music

no singing or choirs
no wind or string instruments,
no whistling or humming of tunes,
no rhythm or beat
no melodies, no harmony
no songwriting, storytelling

A world without music would be a world without color, and depth, beauty.

Albert Einstein once said, *"if I were not a physicist, I would probably be a musician. I often think in music. I live my daydreams in music. I see my life in terms of music. I get most joy in my life out of my violin."*

Even if we're not a musician, we still seek music out.

We listen to music either to match our current state of mind

...or to create a mood or feeling we'd like to have but are not currently experiencing

We do this because music has a way of *connecting* us to a deep reservoir of thoughts & feelings...

- like other art forms, music uplifts
- it transports us to "another world"
- it has a *restorative* quality to it as well
- in the words of our text today, it helps us become "refreshed & well"

MUSIC IN SCRIPTURE

When we turn to the Scriptures, we find references to music and instruments everywhere:

The *Psalms*, of course, were written to be sung and accompanied with a stringed instrument

Specific instruments mentioned by name: cymbals, bells, trumpets, tambourines, harps, flutes, and singing:

*O Come, let us sing to the Lord,
Let us make a joyful shout to the rock of our salvation!
Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving;
Let us make a joyful noise to Him with songs of praise.*

Psalm 95:1-2

The teachings of our church explain the spiritual reason for these references to music in Scripture:

"The reason for it lies in the very nature of sound, and its agreement with affections...for harmonious sounds and the various forms it takes correspond to states of joy and gladness in the spiritual world..." (AC 8337:2).

MUSIC HAS A SPIRITUAL ORIGIN

This explains why music stirs us so deeply.

Listen again to what you heard this morning from the book, *Secrets of Heaven*:

"It is well known that some types of musical instruments are used to express one kind of affection and other types are used to express another kind, and that when a fitting melody is played they in fact stir our affections. Skilled musicians know all about this and also make proper use of it. This ability does not have its origin in the natural world but in the spiritual world..." (no. 8337).

Music in this world is of a *spiritual* origin.

What a profoundly uplifting idea!

This certainly fits with our everyday experience of music.

- Many of us have a wide selection of "genres of music" stored on our electronic devices

Depending on what we're doing, we can pull up a song to match *any* occasion - happy and upbeat, sad and mournful, loud and rousing or soft and calm...

Without even realizing it, we incorporate music into our lives because

- it soothes our soul, our spirit
- it brings harmony into our lives, especially during discordant times

KING SAUL'S "DISTRESSING" SPIRIT

Our text from *1 Samuel 16* is unusual and quite rare in that an "evil spirit" is identified as the source of King Saul's unhappiness.

NKJV calls it a "distressing" spirit but the Hebrew word is "evil spirit."

Unusual to see this phrase in the Old Testament in that "spirits" (good or bad) are rarely mentioned, unlike the New Testament in which the presence of angels and evil spirits is talked about openly (and, of course, in great detail & depth once you get to the Heavenly Doctrines).

Let's consider for a moment this "distressing spirit" of Saul's...

What was going on?

How did he end up getting into this predicament?

King Saul, unfortunately, created for himself what we'd call these days, a "toxic" environment

- made some poor choices
- he let suspicion and jealousy get a grip of him

Role of David, playing the harp:

We're taught that a 'harp' corresponds to the "acknowledgement or confession of the Lord from truth..."

Then this striking statement: *"...since harps have this correspondence evil spirits **cannot endure the sound [of truth]**, hence David drove away the evil spirit from Saul with the harp..." (AR 276)*

David's music drove away the "distressing spirit" because...

...evil cannot tolerate the sound of truth and goodness which is what beautiful, uplifting, harmonious music does for us here on earth

DISCORDANT "MUSIC" IN OUR LIVES

We don't wake up in the morning looking for discord

- we don't seek it out
- **but it certainly finds us!**
- we desperately want harmony, harmonious relationships w/loved ones and friends
- don't want to live in conflict or be at odds with others

And yet, like Saul, it's not unusual to feel a "distressing spirit" come upon us.

Now it's true, sometimes, like Saul, we make poor choices and invite a negative sphere into our lives.

- when this happens, we must simply take responsibility for what we did and deal w/it accordingly

But often we experience a "distressing spirit" without inviting it!

The teachings of our church explain why this phenomenon happens:

We tend to take "ownership" of the negative thoughts and feelings that flow into us because we assume they originate in us

*"We in no sense produce any falsity and evil from ourselves. Instead it is the evil spirits residing with us who produce them, and as they do so they **also convince us that these originate in us.** Such is the nature of their wickedness. And what is more, the moment they instill this into us and convince us, **they also accuse and condemn us...**" (see AC 761).*

How do they accuse and condemn?

- they attack good loves (the very definition of a spiritual temptation/trial)
- they dredge up past mistakes and make us feel ashamed about them even after we've dealt w/them and moved on
- they fill us with anxiety about the past
- make us anxious about the future
- "stir up" any weakness or vulnerability we are particularly prone to (anger, negativity, cynicism, etc.)
- keep our minds locked on negative things

(see for e.g. AC 6097, 8131, 8960).

This is why we need David's harp, the **SOUND OF TRUTH**,

The truth of the Lord's Word will *always* ring clearly in our mind

When we open the Word, it's like inviting a heavenly choir into our mind!

So, in response, to all the accusatory and condemnatory rhetoric of the hells, the Lord tells us a simple truth:

We are not responsible for all the ugly thoughts and feelings that flow into our mind

- We are only responsible for what comes out of our mouth
- Only responsible for what we end up freely choosing to say or do

Like David's harp, this should be music to our ears!

THE SOUND OF TRUTH

In recent years there have been a number of popular books like *Proof of Heaven* and *Heaven is for Real* that recount the "Near Death Experience" of people who underwent some type of physical trauma that triggered temporary "clinical death" which, in turn, allowed them to witness the beginnings of their transition from this world to the next (only to return later back into their physical bodies).

Many of these accounts mention the sound of indescribably beautiful music.

Don Piper, in his book, *90 Minutes in Heaven*, said:

*Music was the single most vivid memory I have of my entire heavenly experience. I call it music, but it differed from anything I had ever heard or ever expect to hear on earth...It was the most beautiful and pleasant sound I've ever heard...I felt awestruck, wanting only to listen...I felt as if the **heavenly concert permeated every part of my being...** None of the hymns that filled the air were about sacrifice or death. **I heard no sad songs.**"*

The teachings of the New Church, of course, confirm this phenomenon and expand on it...

- calling the music there indescribably beautiful and exquisite,

angelic choirs filling the air

"...infusing itself into the very soul of the listeners" (CL 17:2; TCR 745).

So we can think of music in all its forms as an expression of truth, the Lord's truth

We can think of music as a direct expression of the grand themes of life...

- of life and death
- of peace & conflict
- of struggle & victory

The Lord's truth has a "harmonizing" effect on our whole being.

"REFRESHED AND WELL" - LIVING IN HARMONY w/GOD & EACH OTHER

So, we've learned today that...

- a world without music would be dull and lifeless
- the Lord's truth and goodness finds expression through music because music is of a spiritual, not worldly, origin.
- a truly uplifting piece of music, like other art forms, gets its inspiration from the spiritual world (see AC 8337).
- so, when we sing or play an instrument or listen to a beautiful piece of music, heavenly affections are stirred in us
 - we are touched by the harmonious sounds of "joy & gladness"
- our worries and concerns melt into the background, and, like Saul, we become refreshed and well.

These days, a common refrain spoken at dinner parties and family events is that we're living in a deeply divided society (politically and otherwise) and that a solution to what ails us doesn't seem close at hand.

- if a musical score were to be written to represent today's climate, it would likely be discordant, grating, and probably not very uplifting.

However, we can do our part by trying our best to live in *harmony* with the Lord and our neighbor

- by placing ourselves in *harmony* with the teachings of the Word

We can "*sing a new song*" (Ps. 96:1)

sing a "new song" by doing our jobs sincerely, justly and faithfully

- by asking the Lord to help us fight that bad habit we see in ourselves that is causing conflict & discord
- by modeling the Golden Rule, by going the Extra Mile, by Turning the Other Cheek

In this way, we can do our small part of bringing harmony to a discordant world.

*O Come, let us sing to the Lord,
Let us make a joyful shout to the rock of our salvation!
Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving;
Let us make a joyful noise to Him with songs of praise.*

Psalm 95:1-2

AMEN.