



Westminster Presbyterian Church
1200 Marquette Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55403
(612) 332-3421
www.westminstermpls.org

Meditation for Evensong

Margaret McCray

Friday, May 17, 2019

Psalm 121; Philippians 4:4-9; John 2:1-11

Friends, we have come together as the Body of Christ, week after week, celebration after celebration, for worship, baptisms, communion, weddings, memorial services, Christmas dinners, Christmas Eve, Ash Wednesday, Lent, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter..... all the ways we congregate as a community of faith. And tonight we gather for worship at the occasion of the retirement of Melanie Ohnstad, our beloved Minister of Music and the Arts, and our esteemed Organist, who has been, for 24 years, an integral part of all the ways and times we gather to worship. She has been a faithful servant of the Lord, giving of her talents on our behalf, and to the glory of God. Whether we recognized it each time, all our varied celebrations of worship were made richer, deeper, more meaningful by Melanie's hands (and feet!), her heart and her deep faith. Her love,

knowledge, talent and sensitivity to the power of music deepened our connection to God whatever the occasion that called us together.

Like the wedding guests at Cana, we may not notice, as the wine steward did, that the wine we are drinking, the worship we are experiencing, is suddenly richer, deeper, or more satisfying. We only know that our senses are more alert, our experience more profound, the presence of God more acute. Water is essential to human existence but our senses tell us when we are enjoying what goes beyond the essential, and enters the ethereal. Melanie turns our water into wine.

John, the unique Gospel writer, follows his story of the wedding at Cana with the story of Nicodemus, the Pharisee whose faith and senses are stirred up by the deeds and preaching of Jesus. He comes under the cover of night to learn more about this man. Jesus tells him he must be born again, from above, by water and the Spirit. We don't know how this might have changed Nicodemus, but we are seeing Jesus coming to himself. His next encounter is with the Samaritan woman at the well, and it is even more dramatic. He is traveling through Samaria, a territory

inhabited by Samaritans who were considered enemies of the Jews. His disciples have gone to town for food while Jesus rests by a well. A Samaritan woman comes alone to the well with her bucket. She recognizes Jesus as a Jew, and being a Samaritan and a woman and alone, she is surprised that Jesus even speaks to her. He tells her he can offer her living water that will forever satisfy her thirst. This woman, this person, of all those he has encountered so far is the least likely to hear him, believe him and tell his good news to others. Yet she goes so far as to declare he may be the Messiah. Jesus is at the beginning of a few short years of healing, preaching, and teaching, then dying painfully, and rising triumphantly, to eternal life. The waters of his own baptism, the knowledge that God is as close to him as his own breath...manifest within him the good wine, the Spirit, the living water, of justice, love, and mercy that always satisfies, and that he comes to offer each one of us.

Like Jesus, like us, like these stories of awakening faith, Melanie has her own journey of faith. Her love of music accompanies that journey, and we are blessed by the musical worship she prepares for us, a worship that draws us ever closer to God. The wine Melanie has poured for us all these years has a variety that keeps

us coming back for more. Melanie's exquisite sense of the drama of scripture, ritual, prayer, and the present moment; her knowledge of the power of music to move, engage and change us, whether it be organ or choir, the human voice, the voices of children, bells, guitar, trumpet, tympani, violin, cello, sitar, marimba, blue-grass, jazz, Cuban, African, Scandinavian, spirituals, hymns, anthems, Bach, Messiaen, Widor, the voices of Cantus, all these and more... living water, God's love, manifested in music.... carrying us to a "more profound Alleluia."

Typical of Melanie, she has chosen to mark the end of her ministry at Westminster with the quiet depths of an Evensong, an Anglican tradition that dates back to the Reformation. There is a communal feeling here tonight that permeates our senses: the music, the candles, the liturgy, the friends and colleagues who are here to give of their talents and affection in recognition of Melanie, the profound intimacy of the participation we share in this night. Melanie, in her wisdom, knows this is what we need, this is what she needs, all of which is pleasing to God.

I dare say we often take music in worship for granted, but I believe that each one of you can remember more than one, if not many times, when a particular piece of music moved you, became wine, living water, that brought you closer to God, opened you to a depth of emotion you did not expect. Melanie literally and intentionally gives every note on the organ or piano, its due; she lets its uniqueness shine, and the result is a worship we can taste, a spirit we can feel, and living water we can carry away with us.

Melanie is not a miracle worker. Her gifts flow out of her faith, her deep commitment to collaboration, her quiet generosity and extravagant hospitality, and her willingness to give many hours to her calling at Westminster. Some of the most talented musicians in the Twin Cities participate in our services, as they do tonight and will do so on Sunday as well, and it is not because we are the big church downtown ...it's because of Melanie. They know her, respect her, and want to be part of her musical vision. Her personality, her exquisite musicality and talent, her recognition of excellence, her thoughtfulness, her joy in collaboration, all inspire others to join her and us in making music for the glory of God. "When in our music God is glorified

and adoration leaves no room for pride, it is as though the whole Creation cried Alleluia.”

What Melanie gives us, she leaves with us, and to those who will follow her: wider musical paths to walk, deeper spiritual valleys to explore, more resources to call upon, and a legacy of inspiration and excellence. We have come to know and feel that music is foundational to our worship, and this will never change. “Let all rejoice who have a voice to raise, and may God give us faith to sing always, Alleluia!”

Thank you, Melanie, from the depths of our hearts. We give thanks to God for you, we give thanks to God for the blessings of music, the living water that enriches our lives, stirs our emotions, and deepens our faith.

May it always be so.