

THE GIFT OF



MUSIC

I remember when Wednesday nights seemed to be as sacred as Sunday mornings, and were just as beautifully shaped by our most stubborn Lutheran routines. And, of course, if you dared try to alter the holy plan, you would be attempting to throw off the equilibrium of the entire world. With all that being said, for our family in the middle of the week, spaghetti was always for dinner. Then, just before six o'clock, my mom and I would make the trek up to our home Lutheran church for the bell choir rehearsal. Come seven o'clock, we would help set up the folding chairs in front of the altar for the senior choir practice. But before we got started, our director would always insist on reading a devotion with all of us gathered at the front of the sanctuary space. Now, I was no where near the veteran of vocal choirs as others in the group, but that was the first time I had ever experienced what felt like a pause in the vocal proceedings. It made more sense for us to just dive into the rehearsing: to

perfect the pitches of the notes, to ensure our attention paid to dynamic changes and tempo switches with every song, to work on breath control and making sure we actually got our eyes off the music pages and looking up at the director. With all of that on every Wednesday night at 7 docket, wouldn't it just make more sense that we not waste our time with the stuff meant for Sunday morning, and instead, focus on perfecting our singing? Nevertheless, week after week, part of her holy plan was to make the rest of us stubborn Lutherans stop our routine-obsessions in our tracks, and make us be still and know that God is God or something.

Of course, the routine for my mom and I didn't stop there after helping put the folding chairs back. We would get in the car to return home in time for the nine o'clock tv slot on NBC for *The West Wing*, the primetime drama that won nearly 30 *Emmy* Awards with Martin Sheen and Allison Janney among others. But there was this one scene where a guy was running for political office, and he said to his campaign manager, "You've got me preaching to the choir. Why?" And the guy said, "Cuz that's how you get 'em to sing." And that line has stuck with me ever since, thinking back to those few minutes just after seven o'clock, when our choir director insisted on stopping us in our task-oriented tracks and made us listen to a story to put our Wednesday nights into holy perspective. She was indeed preaching to the choir, some of whom were as stubborn of Lutherans as you were ever going to meet, but even they needed a reminder of the Gospel. Some of them had sung in the choir for more years than they could remember, but even they needed a reminder of why we were there. More important than the tuning of the notes or the dynamic changes or the tempo switches, that's how she got us to sing. To sing not just with burying our faces in the music to try to perfect every marking on the page, but to lift our eyes and look out into a gathering of God's children of all ages, and share with them yet another story of God's adoration of them all, so breath-taking that it simply could not be spoken from the pulpit alone, but it had to be sung from the depths of our heart, where God just as beautifully dwelled.

And yes, here at Divinity, we are blessed with Justin, Marlene, Steve, Tricia, Rick, Chad, Dave, Don, and numerous others, who aren't just concerned with notes on a page, but captivating us with a message of hope so contagious, that they must preach it to us with everything they have to give, because that's how they'll get us to sing, too, and not just sing here in this sanctuary space, but to carry that tune of the relentless-grace-and-unconditional-love Gospel wherever we go from here.

Part of that Gospel assurance was shared this morning with the story of a son reunited with his father, and yes, there had to be music as part of the celebration. The son who wondered if he was too far gone, that his parent would no longer take him back. But I like to think that part of the reason why Christ emerges in our broken humanity, is not to save us when we were lost, but to remind us that, in fact, we were never lost at all, because God has insisted on being with us from the beginning. And, in a sense, Christ had to come along and preach to the human choir in order to get us to sing along with the Gospel, to share with the world.

Of course, that choir director, who always insisted on stopping us routine-obsessed Lutherans in our tracks with a devotion, had reached the point in her ministry this year, where she retired from her various roles in directing music, as if any musician can't somehow miraculously play and sing and lead forever. But I'm more than certain that she will always find a way to preach to the entire choir of the faithful, in order to get them to sing, but not just in front of the altar on Sunday mornings or Wednesday evenings, but that our whole life will flow on in endless song, because the most stubborn grace and love of God can never be silenced from the depths of any of our hearts. So, for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!