



What Makes a Song Acceptable for Worship?

-- Nicole Moritz, Coordinator of Music Ministry

Thanks to Pastor Ken for his insightful article last week underscoring the central purpose of a corporate worship service. This understanding is vital to the role of music in corporate worship.

Yes, the Scriptures call on us in many passages to praise the Lord through our music. But not just any song will do. Here is a short list of the questions I ask when determining which songs are appropriate to be sung in the Divine Service. (Spoiler alert: It's mostly about the lyrics.)

- ***Does it point people to Christ?*** If the song doesn't explicitly reference the God we worship, God the Father, God the Son, and/or the Holy Spirit, it probably won't be used. A song that's vaguely inspirational (for example, "The Wind Beneath My Wings") doesn't fit the bill here. Neither does "My Sweet Lord" by George Harrison, because it could be talking about any religion's god. Only our God provides justification and forgiveness of sin through the blood of Christ.
- ***Does it fit the themes of the day and readings from Scripture?*** As a church musician seeking to serve the central purpose of our worship, I spend considerable time planning which hymns and songs fit the readings to provide coherence. For instance, we don't sing "For All the Saints" at Christmas, because it's *not appropriate for that day*. Instead, we plan that hymn to be sung on All Saints Sunday.
- ***Does it contain sound theology? Does it quote or paraphrase Scripture?*** Interestingly, in other traditions, notably the followers of John Calvin and the Reformed church, ONLY the Psalms of David and certain Scriptural canticles were allowed for congregational singing. Lutherans have never been that strict in their interpretation of God-pleasing music; as we know, Luther himself composed hymns for corporate worship. However, in our worship, we want to "think the thoughts of God after Him," and part of this is reminding ourselves what God has spoken to us through His written Word. I like to encourage my friends "*not* to get their theology from Hollywood" (and also not from secular songs like "Imagine"). We don't want to stray from Biblical truth.

- **Is it good quality, singable music?** We of course take into account people's tastes here - what seems good to one may be distasteful to another. But strictly speaking, music from any genre may be fair game. When selecting music for congregational participation (when will COVID go away?), I generally try to find music with an appropriate range and avoid dramatic octave leaps. I only mention this because it does enter into my planning. I promise to do my utmost to provide you all with the finest music I can while including as much variety as possible. We rejoice in the many talents God has given his people.

There are many other considerations, and this is the briefest of introductions to the wonderful world of church music. Hopefully this provides some insight as to how I select our music, and it can also remove the guesswork for those of you who do, at times, select music to sing. As always, feel free to text or call me at 414-625-0318.

Nicole