

Let's Go Deeper...

Wednesday, September 14, 2016

Sunday's 15th anniversary of 9/11 moved me in many ways, but most profoundly through the music that accompanied communion.

Michael Rintamaa's communion music began with "There is a Balm in Gilead." The hauntingly lovely negro spiritual includes the plaintive lyric:

*"Sometimes I feel discouraged and think my work's in vain,
but then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again"*

In Sunday's sermon, I quoted the Nobel Prize-winning Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) who wrote, "Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of [humanity]." The juxtaposition of the word *discouraged*-- God's not being discouraged in the Tagore verse and the acknowledgement of human discouragement in the spiritual-- was brilliant.

Michael then seamlessly segued to a verse from the hymn "My Hope is Built on Nothing Less." Each verse concludes with the boldly confident lyric, "*On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand,*" an allusion to the sermon's mention of Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount:

"If our mood on any given day rises or falls depending on who the current world powers are, who's in the majority in Congress, or the Dow Jones Industrial Average, we're doomed to a lifetime roller coaster ride of peaks and valleys, a ship tossed about on an ever-changing sea. But if we keep our eyes fixed on the One who was and is and ever more shalt be, then our life will be like that of the wise person who built their house upon the rock and when the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew, the house did not fall, because it was built on the rock."

Then came the turn of music that left me digging in my pocket for my handkerchief. With a single note, Michael went into Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings*. If there is a piece of music that belongs with any remembrance of 9/11, it is Barber's masterwork. Composed when Barber was just 26 years old and called "The Saddest Music Ever Written" in a pithy essay by Thomas Larson,¹ I will forever associate Barber's elegy with the September 15, 2001 performance by the BBC orchestra under the direction of Leonard Slatkin².



Unspeakable discouragement is met by divine reassurance. Trembling feet stand upon the Rock that cannot be moved.

A nation's unspeakable lament is given voice in music.

The Savior, crucified and risen, says: "My body broken. My blood shed."

We could ponder the above for months of Sundays and never plumb their depths.

¹ <http://www.thomaslarson.com/publications/essays-and-memoirs/91-the-saddest-music-ever-written.html>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4PWdOoOQjI>