

Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

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Date:	January 24, 2016
Sermon Title:	Briefest Pastoral Sermon Ever
Pastor:	Rev. David Johnson Rowe
Scripture	Music Litany

So I had this great idea. Let's have a really special worship service loaded with music, use some of our favorite musicians and singers, add to our month-long emphasis on JOY, doing it in the middle of January, give us all a treat.

Then Alida comes back from China last Sunday, we had our big wedding anniversary party scheduled for Friday night, and the long-range weather forecast was for snow Friday. So I do my part to be helpful. I pray that God moves the snow off of Friday, which God nicely does, delivering a blizzard on Saturday, a "snow emergency," making it hard to get to church on Sunday.

"Be careful what you ask for," or "unintended consequences," two good clichés for me. But we had a great party, "thank you, Lord," and it is a beautiful New England Sunday, "thank you, Lord," and we still have some great music, "thank you, Lord."

I'm calling this my shortest sermon ever because I'm not really the preacher today. When we developed the "Sports Worship" model a few years ago, and then it evolved into the "Family Room," we decided to move away from the standard sermon: me, standing up here preaching for 17-10 minutes. Instead, the sermon became a dialog, an interview between me and several guests. Our very first guest was an 85-year-old man, Vito Montelli, the legendary basketball coach at St. Josephs, the winningest high school coach in New England. Later we had the Fairfield Prep football coach. From our church, we've had outstanding athletes who excelled in college football, soccer, swimming, lacrosse; we've had our own high school stars: wrestlers, runners, fencers; volleyball, lacrosse, and field hockey players. At one service, we switched the focus to business, interviewing Cindy Bigelow and Brad Orben.

In every interview we learned lessons that tied faith and sports, faith and business, faith and perseverance, faith and effort, faith and family, faith and excellence together. It turns out that so much that makes you strong in sports or strong in business makes you strong as Christians. Indeed, when I asked the Fairfield Prep football coach what he wanted in a high school football player, he took his answer straight out of Jesus's mouth: "I want players who will love their teammates as much as they love themselves, and I will take responsibility for them. That's preaching. He took Scripture; he took an example from life, from work, from sports, and wove it all together.

Today we thought we'd do the same with music. Our music and our musicians, *they* are the sermon. As with any sermon, there's a foundation in Scripture, and our litany ties together a whole bunch of verses from different parts of the Bible, all of which make the same points: music is good for you, you should do more of it, God enjoys it too.

The litany begins with an old story from King David's life, except this takes place when he is still a kid. Israel had a mean king, Saul, rage filled, unstable, jealous, violent. Somebody had the brilliant idea to get some music for him, and in those days the harp was really popular, the guitar of the times, and young David was good at it. He was the singer/songwriter of the day and the Bible tells us that whenever King Saul lost his cool, David did his music, and Saul got peaceful. That probably gave rise to the famous saying, "Music hath charms to sooth the savage breast, to soften rocks or bend a knotted oak," which, by the way, comes from a play in merry old England in 1697.

The point's the same: music can touch us, deeply; transform us, help us, inspire us. It's true. Go to any great concert. I don't care if it's rock 'n' roll or a symphony orchestra; people are loving it, lifted out of their seats, and talk about it for years. Music does that for us.

That's why the Bible is full of exhortations to "Praise the Lord, sing to the Lord, make music to the Lord,": crescendoing with that marvelous Psalm 150, which invites us to "Praise God" with a whole host of instruments: trumpets, tambourines, dancing, strings and flutes and clashing cymbals. Why? Because it's fun. People like it. God likes it!

Every Easter our early service ends with Psalm 150. In case you don't know, the early service is led by our Confirmation class. So it's 7 AM, a bunch of 8th-graders are running the service. So we range from bleary-eyed to raucous, all mixed together.

Then at the end, Alida brings out a box of, yes, tambourines, cymbals, percussion instruments, bongos, kazoos, and distributes them among the people. And as we read together Psalm 150, we create this cacophony of "joyful noise," which is exactly what the Bible says, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord. Come before God with singing." Why? Because it's fun. We enjoy it. God likes it too.

That's my brief sermon. The rest of today's sermon is *music* and *musicians*, letting us hear their "joyful noise unto the Lord," enough to "soothe the savage breast, soften rocks, and bend a knotted oak."

Music Litany

Deacon:

An evil spirit tormented King Saul.
So his attendants searched for someone who could play the HARP so that the King would feel better. They found David from Bethlehem. He knew how to play the harp; he was a brave man and a warrior. So David came to Saul and entered his service. Whenever the evil spirit came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him. (1 Samuel 16:14-23)

Reader:

I will pray with my spirit, I will pray with my mind. I will sing with my spirit, I will sing with my mind. (1 Corinthians 14:15)

Congregation:

Sing for joy to God our strength; shout aloud to God. (Psalm 81:1)

Reader:

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and MAKE MUSIC in your heart to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:19)

Congregation:

Is any one of you in trouble? Then pray. Is any one of you happy? Then SING SONGS of praise. (James 5:13)

Reader:

I will make MUSIC to the Lord. (Judges 5:3) I will extol God with MUSIC and SONG. (Psalm 95:2) I will burst into jubilant SONG with MUSIC. (Psalm 98:4). I will make MUSIC with all my soul. (Psalm 108:1)

Congregation:

SING to the Lord a new SONG. (Psalm 96:1)
Burst into SONG, O mountains.
(Isaiah 49:13)

TOGETHER:

Praise the Lord!
Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty firmament!
Praise him for his mighty deeds;
praise him according to his surpassing
greatness!
Praise him with TRUMPET sound;
praise him with LUTE and HARP!
Praise him with TAMBOURINE and dance;
praise him with STRINGS and PIPE!
Praise him with clanging CYMBALS;
praise him with loud clashing CYMBALS!
Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord!