



**VILLAGE  
CHURCH**

Presbyterian (USA)

## Sing Praise to God

SCRIPTURE:  
Psalm 98

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Jan. 28, 2024 — Sermon by Rev. Dr. Rodger Nishioka

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**S**t. Augustine, the church father and Bishop of North Africa in the 4th and 5th Centuries, said that “to sing is to pray twice” because when we sing, we are not only praying to God or praising God with words, we are also praying to God and praising God with music.

That’s what the Psalmist is singing to us in Psalm 98. You remember that the book of Psalms is a collection of the songs of the Hebrew people. This is the Jewish songbook. All of these Psalms, all 150 of them, are to be sung.

In Psalm 98, verse four says “make a joyful noise to the Lord.” It does not say make a pleasant noise to the Lord or even an in-tune noise to the Lord or even a beautiful melody to the Lord. It just calls on you and me to make a joyful noise. The only criteria is joyful. That’s it. So when you tell me, “I can’t sing,” that’s fine. But you can surely make a noise. Just be joyful about it.

For 75 years, Village Church has been blessed with its remarkable ministry of music. When new members join us, we invite them to tell a little about themselves. And then ask, “What drew you to Village Church?” Often persons will talk about a friend inviting them, which is so important. Some will talk about our commitment to mission. Some will talk about the preaching and our ministries with children and youth. Some will talk about our welcoming all people. And every time, every time, someone talks about the music. Our choirs, our handbell choirs, Village Brass—our music.

At the first worship service on this site on Sunday, Nov. 7, 1948, four months before we were officially chartered as a congregation, the congregation sang the great hymn, “The Church’s One Foundation.” They are worshiping in a brand-new building that is going up around them. It’s not yet completed, and they sing: “The church’s one foundation is Jesus

Christ her Lord. She is his new creation by water and the word. From heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride. With his own blood he bought her and for her life he died.”

An announcement in that first bulletin read, “The church hopes to have an adult choir organized by next month. All friends of the church interested in being in the choir, please call the church office during this next week.”

Dr. Bob Meneilly knew that music was a key component for this new congregation. The first organ in the church was a Hammond electric organ donated by Mrs. Clara Aiken Speer in loving memory of her infant daughter. There is no mention of how or when her daughter died but I imagine it was a gift for Mrs. Speer every time she heard that organ play. Patricia Miller was the organist. Jim Chase was the first part-time choir director starting in March 1949.

But in 1950, the music ministry had grown so we needed a full-time director of music. Dr. Istvan Gladics was called. Because we’re Midwesterners and Istvan was a stretch, we called him “Steve.” Steve served us for 20 years and retired in 1970. In May 1967, Dr. Gladics was awarded a citation by the American Federation of Music for distinguished service to the cause of music in the great state of Kansas. It was under his leadership that Village Church purchased its first set of handbells and started its first handbell choir.

In 1954, the inimitable LaVergne Friday was called to be organist here. She served for 44 years—almost as long as Dr. Bob served as pastor. In 1982, Village Church was privileged with its first pipe organ: a Moller pipe organ with 4,945 pipes in 89 ranks. Helen Hogan was called as assistant organist to support LaVergne. By 1984, there were six bell choirs with the youngest for children in grades 4–6. A year later, the first Village Church orchestra was started.

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By the early 90s, there were more than 300 voices in three different choirs and 50 youth in a choir for 7th through 12th graders. Village also had 164 children singing in four choirs from kindergarteners through 6th graders.

The congregation then consisted of more than 7,700 members worshipping at three different worship services every Sunday morning. An idea was birthed that it would be wonderful one Sunday to have one worship service for everyone, so on May 2, 1993, one worship service was held at the auditorium belonging to the Reorganized Church of Latter Day Saints (now the Community of Christ in Independence, Missouri). More than 4,400 people attended along with the full choir, orchestra and bell choirs and all the children's and youth choirs. They called it the "All-member Celebration" and it was surely a high point in our life as a church. All of us. All together. In one place. Praising God. Barbara Chonko was the leader of that incredible undertaking.

At that service, the opening hymn was "Lift High the Cross." "Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim till all the world adore his sacred name. Come, Christians, follow where our Savior trod, the lamb victorious, Christ the Son of God. Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim till all the world adore his sacred name."

The worship bulletin read, "Everyone here is part of the same family—we are the family of God together. God welcomes us all and embraces each one of us. Let us celebrate our oneness in Christ. It is Village Church's purpose to reflect that image of Christ's love, now and in the future."

Throughout our life together, we have been blessed with faithful, gifted leaders in music ministry. From Dr. Istvan Gladics, to Dallas Draper, Larry Dean, Bill Baker, Mark Ball, Will Breytspraak, and today

with Cameron Rolling and Dr. Jan Kraybill at Village on Antioch and Drs. Elisa Bickers and Josh Maize and Theo Musick and Jenny Hull and Dr. Langston Hemingway and Helen Hoffmeister here at our Mission campus. My goodness! Such gifted people.

It was here that our pastor Tom Are was introduced to what became a favorite hymn for him. We sang it at his final service when he preached here last October, "How Can I Keep From Singing." "My life flows on in endless song, above earth's lamentation. I hear the clear, though far off hymn, that hails a new creation. No storm can shake my inmost calm while to that rock I'm clinging. Since Christ is Lord of Heaven and Earth. How can I keep from singing?"

The truth is: We cannot. We cannot help but make music. We cannot help but praise God.

Soon after he arrived here in 2004, our senior pastor Tom Are spoke about his experience at our children and family Christmas Eve service. It was a pageant of sorts and there were children all around. There was a makeshift cityscape of Jerusalem across this chancel. It was loud and a bit chaotic as Christmas pageants are supposed to be.

Helen Hogan was the pianist that night and Tom remembers that while the program was going on, Helen walked across the chancel, behind the Jerusalem props, and said to him, "Tom, look out there. Look at all those faces." And in the lights, he looked out and could see the faces of the children and their parents and grandparents and friends and it was joyful. It was all joy.

The psalmist says, "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises." Thanks be to God for 75 years of music all for your glory, O God. All to glorify you.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.