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Salina Mennonite Church
July 5, 2020
Scripture: Psalm 33

A Medley of Thoughts

The last time more than a handful of us met in this room on a Sunday morning was March 15th, 15 weeks ago. Since then we've gathered via Zoom – celebrating Easter and Pentecost, talking about spiritual practices, reading scripture, praying, sharing artwork, discussing church business, and playing games. Today begins another new venture, with some of us in the sanctuary and others joining worship from their homes.

As a prepared for this occasion, I found it difficult to settle on a theme or a scripture. How do we mark this Sunday of transition? Should I talk about the Fourth of July? What thoughts and emotions have we brought with us to worship?

When the county and state issued safer at home orders in March, I envisioned our first Sunday all together in one place being filled with singing. Oh, how I've missed congregational singing. But we aren't all in one place today. And singing with gusto in an enclosed space is one of the riskiest activities we could participate in.

The July issue of *The Mennonite*¹ arrived early this week. It's one of those issues that I open immediately and read some of the articles. The combination of music, worship, and pandemic mirrored what was going on in my head.

On Tuesday, I had the title of today's sermon: *A Medley of Thoughts*. But then I got stuck. I didn't have a clue what scripture to use.

So I began planning the worship service in a different order than usual – choosing a call to worship, a story to tell, and the songs before I chose a scripture passage. It wasn't until 2:22 yesterday afternoon that I decided on Psalm 33. The combination of singing God's praises, asking God for help, and trusting in God rather than in a nation's armies seemed fitting for this first Sunday in July.

Even after finally settling on a scripture, I wasn't sure my words would qualify as a sermon, so I labeled these words as remarks rather than a sermon. I won't be expounding on the psalm. Instead, I offer you a smattering of items from *The Mennonite* along with some personal thoughts.

On the letters page are the responses to a Facebook Post asking participants to write about "reopenings" using only six words. Here are some of their responses: This will absolutely not end well. Jesus, if you lead I will follow. Scared, defeated, hopeless, horrified, worried, angry. Individual choices, proceed with caution, pray. Anxiety, because people don't respect others. Masks will keep my neighbors safe. Cautious, sad, lungs compromised, home. It's time, faith over fear y'all.

I imagine all of these feelings are reflected in this congregation. Some of us holding contradictory thoughts simultaneously. We listen to medical, government, and economic experts. We weigh the risks and rewards. We consider physical, emotional, social, and mental health. And we make decisions about what to do, where to go, and who to see. As a caring community of faith, I trust we are doing what we can to meet our spiritual needs, be hospitable to other worshipers and keep ourselves and each other safe.

¹ <https://themennonite.org/the-magazine/current-issue/>

One of the articles in *The Mennonite* is titled “Tonal Communion: The Centrality of Music in Worship. Joanne Gallardo, one of my seminary classmates, tells of her journey with church music. She sang gospel songs with her mother at an Independent Fundamental Baptist Church. She listened to the priest, cantor, and organ at a Catholic church with her father. She discovered a capella, four-part singing at a small Mennonite church in Ohio. Now she is a pastor at a Mennonite church in Indiana.

Joanne lists three things music provides in worship that no other element of the worship service can give her. (1) It provides a connection to our past. It connects us to our denomination 20, 30, hundreds of years ago, depending on the music and text. (2) It allows us another way to pray. Through congregational music and singing, we transport ourselves to the holy place we all need to enter before coming to God in prayer. (3) It allows us another way to participate. Singing allows us an avenue to be actively involved in our collective worship. Vibrations from our own body match the vibrations heard around the room.

So it’s a loss that those of us in this room can’t sing together. Those of you at home can sing along with the recorded music as loudly as you wish. I look forward to the time, whenever that may be, when we can sing together in this space again. In the meantime, our spirits can sing, even if our voices cannot.

Thanks be to God!