

The anatomy of an Anglican service:

Why Do We Sing Together?

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People from all four corners of the earth love to sing. Some of us are better at it than others. But why do we sing? And why do we sing in church? I want to share four reasons why we sing together:

1) Because of the gospel

The arrival of Jesus Christ rekindled the hope of the Old Testament. His life, death, resurrection and ascension accomplished God's plans and purposes to enthrone his Christ as Lord of all. Jesus made possible the forgiveness of sins and brought about the offer of eternal life and adoption as God's children. To grasp and rely on these truths of the gospel is to be filled with joy because we have been forgiven, we have been adopted, and we hope for new life. It is out of this great joy, in the midst of whatever trouble or pain we may face, that we sing. We can sing in the face of pain. We sing for joy because of Christ and the hope he has given us. He has set us free, he has dealt with our sin and defeated death, and he reigns. We sing because of the gospel, because singing reflects our joy of being known and loved by God.

2) Because of Scripture

We also sing because of Scripture. The Bible itself exhorts us to sing, such as in Colossians 3:16:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to

God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Scripture exhorts us to sing, but more than that, Scripture shows us how to sing.

When Israel had escaped the warriors of Egypt, they sang. From Exodus 15:1,

Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying, "I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea".

When Mary visits Elizabeth and rejoices with her, she sang. From Luke 1:46,

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour".

It is right to sing, especially when we recognise what God has done for us in the gospel. It is right to sing because Scripture exhorts us to sing in thankful response to God and shows us that singing is an appropriate response to God's grace and mercy shown to us.

3) Because we are human

We sing because we are God's creatures, made and loved by him. We are not God; we respond to God and singing is an act of response. We are humans who have been created with voice boxes and ear drums to enable this response to happen. We sing because we are physical, because we are embodied. Singing captures our entire being as we use our bodies to produce sounds of thanksgiving in song. Singing engages our emotions and stirs our souls. We feel the rhythm and the rhyme. We are physical and

embodied creatures made to love and serve God in thankful response to him. Singing draws together our entire embodied humanity into the truths we are proclaiming in song.

Our bodies are affirmed in the gospel as Jesus Christ rose bodily from the dead. This is crucial to recognise, especially in the context of a fallen and sinful humanity. Sin breaks and damages our bodily ability to respond in thankfulness to God. But in the gospel we have hope of bodily renewal, and in some sense we taste this future reality when we sing and feel deep joy for what Christ has done for us. We sing because we are human.

4) Because of each other

Lastly, we sing because we are a community of believers. Singing is a one-another activity. An opportunity for God's gathered community to minister to, exhort, and admonish each other. It is one of the best ways we can value the body of Christ, allowing all to sing to one another.

When speaking about gathering in 1 Corinthians 14:40, Paul says,

"But all things should be done decently and in order."

Coming together and singing the same words to the same tune and same rhythm beautifully reflects Paul's desire for orderly gatherings of Christians. We sing because of each other, because it is an orderly way of ministering to and exhorting one another when we gather together.

Some implications

So, we sing because of the gospel, because of Scripture, because we are human, and because of each other.

Singing when we gather, then, is not about me. It's about God, his gospel, and proclaiming that to one another in an orderly and embodied way. Practically that means three things.

First, it means the music (band or video) is there to support the vocal activity of God's people in their singing. We put a premium on the whole voice of the congregation.

Second, the music should not be louder than our voices, because we want to hear one another proclaiming truths to the glory of God.

Third, the music should facilitate our melody and rhythm in a cooperative and helpful way, complementing our voices.