

## **“The Power of Hymns”**

A message shared by members of the congregation of St. Andrew’s United Church on  
Sunday, January 29, 2016, 10:30 a.m.

**Scripture Readings:** Psalm 15 (VU#736)  
Matthew 5:1-12

### ***James Warner-Smith, Narrator***

This morning we will be singing four extra hymns that will serve as our message. Each hymn will be introduced by a story from one of our choir members about how this hymn bears special significance for them. A hymn is always much more than the music and words assembled together. It is a blend of the musical and textual images that connect with our spiritual and religious experiences that have been meaningful to us. As well, our special hymns often contain the strength of memories and emotions that transport us back to the times that we have sung it in the past.

The first hymn is from Donna Mese, who is unable to be here today, and it is *Breathe on Me, Breath of God*

Donna writes:

It has just always been my favorite - I can't remember when I didn't know the words by heart. It wasn't a powerful moment of discovery, just a slow realization that the words meant so much to me. The image of God breathing breath on me means God caring about me and being alive in my life. The hymn is a call to live my life as God would want me to. It kind of reminds me of the CGIT purpose. That others may be able to see God's love glowing through me is a powerful statement of love and responsibility. I also love the minor feeling of the melody. I learned the tenor part a long time ago when I was in the church choir with Betty Leake and sing tenor whenever I get the chance. The memories and emotions of singing this hymn when I was young are strong. Listen, I am singing tenor along with you today.

Let's join together in *Breathe on Me, Breath of God, Voices United #382*

Breathe on me, breath of God, fill me with life anew,  
that I may love what thou dost love, and do what thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, breath of God, till I am holy thine,  
until this earthly part of me glows with thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, breath of God, till I am holy thine,  
until this earthly part of me glows with thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, breath of God: so shall I never die,  
but live with thee the perfect life to thine eternity.

The second hymn is from Roger Pile, who is with us today but is up in the sound booth and has asked that his story be read.

Roger writes:

In my hometown of Barrie, our family attended Collier Street United Church. My mother was the superintendent of the Primary Sunday School and Dad was the superintendent of the Junior school. Once I reached high school age, I operated the “magic lantern” which projected the hymns onto the screen. Back then, the hymn slides were adorned with classic biblical pictures as well as the hymn text. For new hymns, for which we had no slides, Dad created slides, typing the text onto cellophane and sealing them between two pieces of glass the size of the projector tray.

Growing up, Mom was the musical one but Dad loved to sing, albeit not necessarily staying in the key that the song started in! He was brought up in the Anglican Church where he first learned this hymn. It was always his favourite and we sang it often at Sunday school. The text was written by Maltbie Davenport Babcock and published in 1901. Babcock would often go walking along the Niagara Escarpment in upper New York state, telling his wife that he was “going out to see the Father’s world.” The original poem contained 16 verses. It was set to music in 1915 by his friend, Franklin L. Sheppard and is based on a traditional English melody that Sheppard had learned as a child. He created three stanzas incorporating six of Babcock’s original verses.

We sang this hymn at Dad’s funeral in 2011.

Let’s sing two verses of “This Is My Father’s World.” The words were updated to be more inclusive in Voices United as “This Is God’s Wondrous World” but today we will sing the old version.

This is my Father’s world,  
and to my listening ears  
all nature sings, and round me rings  
the music of the spheres.  
This is my Father’s world;  
I rest me in the thought  
of rocks and trees, of skies, and seas,  
His hand the wonders wrought.

This is my Father’s world;  
the birds their carols raise;  
the morning light, the lily white,  
declare their Maker’s praise.  
This is my Father’s world;  
He shines on all that’s fair;  
in the rustling grass I hear Him pass;  
He speaks to me everywhere.

The third hymn story has been chosen by Ralph McIntosh and Ralph will present his own story:

Soon after the publication of the red *Hymn Book* in 1971, a presbytery-wide service was held at St. Luke's United Church in Toronto. It was an evening service built around the new hymn book - I don't remember much about the actual service, but what I do remember was singing in the huge choir that was recruited from a number of congregations.

St. Luke's has a huge sanctuary, with a centre aisle about a mile long, and a huge pipe organ to match. The organist at that time was Mr. Hillier, and the processional hymn that evening was "All My Hope On God Is Founded." I had never sung that hymn before, but I found its vividly descriptive text and harmonic structure interesting, and it sounded wonderful with the 60 or so voice choir during the rehearsal. However, when we started the processional hymn, and the choir was joined by the voices of the very large congregation, supported by the magnificent organ, the sound was incredible and, to my ears, awe-inspiring.

I will never forget the feeling that ran through me during the closing bars of that hymn, standing in the midst of the largest choir and congregation that I'd even seen or heard at that point in my life as the organ thundered out the closing chords of the hymn at full fortissimo. Every time I sing that hymn, I am reminded of that experience.

Let us sing "All My Hope on God is Founded," Voices United #655.

All my hope on God is founded;  
who doth still my trust renew:  
I through change and chance am guided,  
only good and only true.  
God, unknown; God alone  
calls my heart eternally home.

Human pride and earthly glory,  
sword and crown, betray our trust;  
what with care and toil is built up,  
tower and temple, fall to dust.  
But God's power, hour by hour,  
is my temple and my tower.

Daily doth the almighty giver  
bounteous gifts on us bestow.  
God's desire our soul delighteth,  
pleasure leads us where we go.  
Love doth stand hand in hand;  
joy doth wait on God's command.

God's great goodness aye endureth,  
deepest wisdom, passing thought:  
splendour, light and life attending,  
beauty springeth out of naught.  
Evermore from God's store  
new-born worlds arise and adore.

The final story is from Leslie King. Leslie is away today and has asked that her story be read.

Leslie writes:

A couple of years ago, Voices United came to my aid in an unexpected way.

I had come home from doing errands on a Saturday, to find a phone message from the police in Auckland, New Zealand, where my daughter Julia was studying. The message asked if I were Julia King's next of kin, as stated in her passport. If so, I should call City Hospital.

Shaking uncontrollably, I called and was put through to a doctor who told me that Julia had had a bicycling accident. She was in intensive care and was being kept sedated while they assessed possible damage to her brain. After asking all the questions my own paralyzed brain could grasp at, I asked the surgeon what she thought I should do.

"Get here," she said, "if possible."

By the time I hung up, Bernie had booked me on a series of flights. I had two hours to make calls and to pack for an unknown length of stay.

Having adrenalin coursing through your system is an advantage when fleeing wolves in the distance, or something, but not so helpful for thinking clearly in an emergency. I knew that it was possible there would be some very hard decisions to make in the days ahead. I would be alone on the other side of the world with my darling daughter depending on me to do what was best.

Another person in this situation would pack a Bible. However, grateful years of being part of the church choir have taught me that hymns are prayers set to music, and that singing is praying at some level. I went to the copy of *Voices United* that was on top of the piano. I leafed through it, looking for the hymns that would offer me courage and comfort. And when I found my favourites, I ripped them out and tucked them into my suitcase.

There were many. *Precious Lord, Take My Hand. The Lord is My Shepherd. Lord Jesus, You Shall Be My Song. Be Thou My Vision. My Lord, What a Morning.* But the hymn I ask for this morning is *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*.

As for Julia, she has had what we consider a miraculous recovery from the brain damage she sustained. There are some lingering effects, but really, she's doing everything she was doing before -- except riding a bike! -- and with her usual gusto. "Morning by morning new mercies I see."

Let's join together in singing "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," Voices United #288.

Great is thy faithfulness, God our Creator;  
there is no shadow of turning with thee;  
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;  
as thou hast been thou forever wilt be.

*Refrain: Great is thy faithfulness!  
Great is thy faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see;  
all I have needed thy hand hath provided –  
great is thy faithfulness, ever to me!*

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,  
sun, moon, and stars in their courses above  
join with all nature in manifold witness  
to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

*Refrain: Great is thy faithfulness!  
Great is thy faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see;  
all I have needed thy hand hath provided –  
great is thy faithfulness, ever to me!*

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,  
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,  
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow –  
wondrous the portion thy blessings provide. .

*Refrain: Great is thy faithfulness!  
Great is thy faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see;  
all I have needed thy hand hath provided –  
great is thy faithfulness, ever to me!*