

## **“We Know What We Believe by the Hymns That We Sing”**

A Sermon Shared with the Congregation of  
St. Andrew’s United Church

for Sunday, May 29, 2016 – Pentecost 3,

Scripture Readings: Psalm 149:1-5

John 16:4b-11

(by The Rev. Dr. Bill Steadman)

Music is something very personal, and animates our own sense of self.

Many people will openly self-define who they are by their musical tastes. Profiles on Facebook have such personal insights as “I like all kinds of music --- except rap,” or “I enjoy every genre of music, but my car radio is always set to country music.”

Music often defines who we are and what we like.

The same is true within the church. The Psalms from the earliest day in Jewish history were sung. We do not know exactly what the music was, but in the Roman Catholic tradition there is an attempt to relive that by having a cantor sing the Psalm of the day and the congregation responds with a chorus.

In the Protestant tradition, *The Scottish Psalter* became the first main hymn book, but soon hymn writers wrote pieces based on scripture passages beyond the Psalms. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century many, if not most hymns, were sharing insights on how the faith and the biblical tradition impacts upon our own lives. Hymns did not just tell the story of scripture, but what that story meant for our lives. One of those hymns could have been used this morning:

*“Breathe on me, breath of God. Fill me with life anew...”* It is based on

the understanding of the Spirit in the New Testament, but speaks to the life of the believer today.

The mark of a healthy congregation usually means that if a survey is taken of the congregation, at least 90% evaluate the music programme as excellent. Concerns about the music program result in dissatisfaction about the worship experience. That puts large expectation and pressure upon a music director and a choir (but Bob and the choir here at St. Andrew's can more than take it).

By the late 20<sup>th</sup> century hymns had a new focus beyond how the biblical tradition impacts upon our lives – hymns started to speak about our understanding of Jesus, God, the Spirit, community and faith in ways that have evolved.

Many of the hymns sung today, a combination of hymns chosen by Catherine and I, along with ones suggested by others, speak to our journey of faith, and the ways in which the spirit guides us and inspires us.

You see, there are many ways to learn about the faith we share. We can be inspired by individuals who live a life as an example of what Jesus taught and shared; we can sing words and images that inspire us and comfort us; we can be inspired by art and images and even buildings that life our souls and nourish our spirits.

One thing is for certain: we need to welcome the music that inspires others, and appreciate the power of music to lift us into new awareness of faith and hope.

Thanks be to God who gives us the gift of music, and for those who live that gift each week within our lives.