

where it was coming from, but sometimes I felt like I could sing forever.

“Eventually, a few months after I started coming, I took a seat in one of the folding chairs, off by myself. Then the singing enveloped me. . .

“Something inside me that was still and rotting would feel soft and tender. Somehow the singing wore down all the boundaries and distinctions that kept me so isolated.”²

The ministry of music.

D.L. Moody was a pioneer in mass evangelism. Moody also knew the power of music to wear down the boundaries and distinctions that keep us so isolated. He looked for someone who could work with him in evangelism, but through the ministry of music. He found that person in Ira Sankey.

Ira Sankey was a layman who worked for the Treasury Department, but he loved to sing and was gifted in music. He was attending a Y.M.C.A convention in Indianapolis. Let me read the story.

“In connection with the convention, it was announced that Moody was to speak at an early morning prayer meeting in a Baptist church on a Sunday morning. Sankey was most anxious to hear and meet the man. Having arrived a little late at the meeting, he sat near the door with a Presbyterian minister who urged Sankey to start a song. At the right moment, as Moody requested a song, Sankey started to sing, *There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood*. The congregation joined in heartily and the meeting took on a new impetus. At the close of the service, he was introduced to Moody, who abruptly asked him terse questions. When asked about his business, Sankey replied that he was employed by the government. Moody remarked, *‘You will have to give it up!’* Nonplussed, Sankey listened to the evangelist who said, *‘I have been looking for you for eight years.’*”³

Thus began one of the most productive partnerships in Christian ministry.

For the last eleven years, it has been my privilege to have a partnership in Christian ministry with Ray Hatton. We have written hymn tunes and anthems together; we have led prayer retreats and programs together; we have played together, prayed together, dreamed together, cried together, and once in while, created mischief together. But mostly, we have planned worship together.

Ray is the liturgist, the worship planner. He is the one who puts this worship service together each week. But once in a while, he allows me to tinker with the service. Like the time that I could not think of a sermon to preach.

It was Thursday night and I had struggled with my sermon all week. Our family was at the dinner table and I confessed that it had been a difficult day. It was Thursday night and there was still no sermon idea. Charlotte, who was 4½ years at the time, said, “How hard can it be to write a sermon? Just talk about God.” I explained that I have to know what to say about God. She said, “Just tell them that God loves them, that Jesus died for them. That’s all!”

I came in on Friday morning with Charlotte’s sermon and asked Ray if we change the liturgy for that Sunday and include his song, “This I Know.” For me, it was one of the most powerful worship experiences that we have had at First Baptist Church.

The ministry of music. There is no preaching in heaven. But there is a lot of singing. In heaven, we are going to sing the truth that “God loves you, Jesus died for you. That’s all!”

¹ Tom Long, *Beyond the Worship Wars*, p. 55.

² Ann Lamott, *Traveling Mercies*, p. 47f.

³ Retrieved from <http://www.eaec.org/faithhallfame/irasankey.htm> 9-5-06.


FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
Let Us Share First With You.



September 10, 2006
Fourteenth Sunday of Kingdomtide

The Ministry of Music

Rev. Dr. Kenneth A. Corr, Pastor
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Memphis, Tennessee 38112

Listen to the Word of God. The Psalmist says,

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth, worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing (Psalm 100);

Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things (Psalm 98);

I will sing of loyalty and justice; to you O Lord, I will sing (Psalm 101);

Sing to him; sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works (Psalm 105);

My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make melody (Psalm 108);

I will sing praises to my God all my life long (Psalm 146);

How good it is to sing praises to our God; for he is gracious and a song of praise is fitting (Psalm 147).

The Psalmist can't imagine worship without singing and neither can we. How boring our worship would be without music! Today we are celebrating twenty years of music ministry under the faithful leadership of Ray Hatton. This morning, I want to think with you about the ministry of music.

Much more than religious entertainment, music has the ability to inspire, convict, encourage, and heal us at the deepest level of our being. Let me illustrate what I mean. Maybe you can relate to this story.

Liza came to church wounded and confused. Dave had walked out the night before and this time she knew that he would not be back. She was angry, hurt, and anxious. She was not sure why she came to church or exactly what she wanted or expected. But here she was. She came late and sat near the back so that she would not have to speak to anyone.

The sermon was something about missions and was preached with great enthusiasm, but it was not what Liza needed. Her mind wandered to what she would do now that Dave had left for

good. She remembered the many hurtful things that had been said and she felt miserable. As she pondered these things, she thought that maybe coming to church was not a good idea and wondered if she could leave without being noticed. As she looked for the nearest exit, the choir began to sing. Liza knew the familiar words, "When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll." The music filled the room and Liza felt a sudden flood of emotion that glued her to the seat. "It is well with my soul. It is well, it is well, with my soul." The music began to massage her deep woundedness and Liza felt the presence of God. "That Christ has regarded my helpless estate and hath shed his own blood for my soul." Suddenly the tears began to flow. The pain of these recent days just poured out of her. "It is well, it is well, with my soul." And there, near the back of the sanctuary all alone, Liza knew that she would be okay.

The ministry of music. At some point in our spiritual lives, we have all felt it. I was saved on April 10, 1960. I don't remember the sermon title, the sermon text, or one thing the preacher said, but I do remember that we were singing "Just As I Am," as I came down the aisle. In his book, Beyond the Worship Wars, Tom Long says, "A person's music is a powerful alloy of memory and emotion, experience and conviction, expression and aspiration."¹

When the apostle Paul thought about evidence of the indwelling Holy Spirit, he could have listed prayer, or faith, or service, or love. But for the apostle Paul, the evidence of the indwelling Holy Spirit was "Singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord." Maybe Paul was thinking of his own experience.

Paul and his good friend Silas were arrested and put into jail in Philippi. They

were placed in the inner prison, the most secure part of the prison. They were placed in the stocks, a kind of torture chamber that made it impossible to escape.

During the night, they sang hymns. The Bible says, "The prisoners were listening." My guess is that they were listening because they had never heard hymn singing in the prison before: cursing, of course; screaming, certainly; shrieking, perhaps, but never hymn singing. And they listened. I think the music massaged their wounded spirits because when the prison doors were opened, no one escaped. My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make melody (Psalm 108);

The ministry of music.

Ann Lamott understands. In her wonderful book, Traveling Mercies, she tells how she experienced Christian conversion out of a life of drug addiction and atheism. She was in a flea market one Sunday and heard music from the St. Andrew Presbyterian church. Ann says, "It looked homely and impoverished, a ramshackle building with a cross on top, sitting on a small parcel of land with a few skinny pine trees. But the music wafting out was so pretty that I would stop and listen. I knew a lot of the hymns from the times I'd gone to church with my grandparents and from the albums we'd had of spirituals. Finally, I began stopping in at St. Andrew from time to time, standing in the doorway to listen to the songs. . . . I went back to St. Andrew about once a month. No one tried to con me into sitting down or staying. I always left before the sermon. I loved singing, even about Jesus, but I just didn't want to be preached at about him. . . . It was the singing that pulled me in and split me wide open.

"I could sing better here than I ever had before. As part of these people, even though I stayed in the doorway, I did not recognize my own voice or know