

FPCU Celebrating the Life of Matt Miles October 11, 2026
 Rev. Dr. Tina Blair

Scriptural Meditation

Psalm 96

What are we to say and do as we face the great mystery of life and death? As in our grief we ponder who God is, what life is, what death is – we are faced with unknowable mystery. It's all beyond our understanding, beyond words, even though so many words have been written to grasp these realities -- words in our holy scriptures, words in books by theologians, words in our own diaries and journals. Perhaps the best words and expressions of this holy mystery come from the artists, the poets, and the musicians. What do we do, then, as in our grief we cry out to our God and ponder the deep questions of life and death? I think we are called to do what Matt would do – we sing!

What is it about music and singing? Tillich, a famous German theologian, was asked once by a student, “What do you do when you are hit by doubt in your faith?” The theologian answered, “Ach! I listen to the B Minor Mass by Bach.”

Don't many of us do that? It might not be Bach we listen to, but we often have some favorite piece of music – classical, folk, Christian pop, Gospel, whatever – that soothes our soul. Music brings to us a feeling of grounding and of being in touch with God – with God's beauty and goodness, God's love and compassion.

How is it that music does this? I think music has echoes of God's voice.

The Narnia series by C.S. Lewis consists of 7 fantasy books for children (also meaningful for adults) in which Aslan the Lion is the Christ figure. In the book, *The Magician's Nephew*, a boy arrives just in time to see the Lion with mouth wide open singing – singing the land of Narnia into existence. I love this picture, and like to imagine our God singing creation into being. You see, our English translations don't do justice to the Hebrew accounting of God speaking the words of creation in Genesis 1. We write, “God said,” but in Hebrew the word has more power, more dynamism. It is active, like a force, a wave of energy sent out, creating as it goes, expanding down the ages. It keeps creating, as God does even today. The word “speech” is a little closer. But I prefer the idea of song – those waves of sound that roll through the universe, always dynamic, shaping all they touch. God's Song resounds through time, down the ages, creating, shaping, echoing in our arts and music.

People have always sung. We sing to praise the Holy God. Our ancestors who painted the cave paintings 25,000 years ago clearly thought artistically and no doubt also sang. Our Holy Scriptures have a whole book of songs, the “Psalms,” gathered 3000 years ago and used in worship. The Psalms encourage us to sing, to allow God’s voice to echo within us. The Psalms sing out joy and sorrow, hope and despair. They are prayers in poetry and music that open us to worshiping our Creator more honestly and more deeply. “Sing to the Lord a new song,” they sing. Many Psalms (33, 40, 96, 98, 144, 149) call for a “new song” as God opens new possibilities. Many more encourage us to sing songs of praise to our God. Others sing of God’s justice. And one, Psalm 137, points out that they cannot sing songs to God as captives in Babylon. In these songs of praise and lament, we join with all peoples who have praised God before us. With our music, we join the music of creation, created in song by our Creator, the One Holy God.

Good music of all kinds carries echoes of God’s creating, renewing and sustaining Word-Song. Matt certainly seemed to feel this in the depth of his soul. He loved music of all kinds. He directed the Mountainside Master Chorale which I sing in (along with the Carpenters and until recently Jan McCrea-Foster), and with him we sang a large variety of music -- from classical, contemporary classical, and spirituals, to pop culture ditties. He confided in me, as one classical music lover to another, that he had not really known contemporary Praise Music, but had come to really liking it here at FPCU. (As I have also!) His joy in his singing was so evident that it gave us intense joy, and at times, a hard-to-describe feeling of God’s presence. His joy in conducting, and his joy in our singing also spilled over to encourage and improve us, both in the chorale and in our choir here. His love of music carried with it patience, kindness and understanding, as he sought to help us sing more beautifully. He worked to deepen our joy in the beauty of what we were singing, whatever key or language it was in. In that beauty we found a sense of God’s presence.

Matt has joined the heavenly chorale too soon. Perhaps he is also chatting with Faure’ and Mozart and Bach! Matt is now one with the great mystery that is eternal life with God. But he will always be with us, reminding us of the joy and beauty of music. He will watch over us, knowing that in music we will hear the echoes of God’s creation song and will know God’s presence is with us. Thank you, Matt! Thank you, Holy Loving God! Amen.

Psalm 96

O sing to the Lord a new song;
 sing to the Lord, all the earth.
² Sing to the Lord; bless his name;
 tell of his salvation from day to day.
³ Declare his glory among the nations,
 his marvelous works among all the peoples.
⁴ For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised;
 he is to be revered above all gods.
⁵ For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
 but the Lord made the heavens.
⁶ Honor and majesty are before him;
 strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.
⁷ Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
 ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
⁸ Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;
 bring an offering, and come into his courts.
⁹ Worship the Lord in holy splendor;
 tremble before him, all the earth.
¹⁰ Say among the nations, "The Lord is king!
 The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.
 He will judge the peoples with equity."
¹¹ Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
 let the sea roar and all that fills it;
¹² let the field exult and everything in it.
 Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
¹³ before the Lord, for he is coming,
 for he is coming to judge the earth.
 He will judge the world with righteousness
 and the peoples with his truth