

Why Aren't We Singing?

"Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises."
Psalm 98: 4

Every now and then I come across an article in the paper or in a magazine that raises a concern that I've had for some time. It happened recently with an article titled, *I Hear America Not Singing*, by Lenore Skenazy.

She says that singing is "that once-universal pastime that uplifts the soul, reboots the body, and doesn't demand a monthly fee...Singing is so basic to human happiness that some scientists say it may have evolved even before language. It was the way stories were passed down before writing, because it's a lot easier to remember a song than a paragraph...Singing lowers blood pressure. Even people with lung cancer feel better when singing. It boosted immune proteins in a study of cancer patients... So why aren't we singing all the time?"

Her emphasis is on the word WE. America is constantly listening to someone or some group sing. People pay big bucks to attend concerts by their favorite performers. We listen to individuals struggling with *The Star-Spangled Banner* before ball games. We listen to the radio, smartphones, and YouTube. But WE, as gathered groups of Americans, don't sing much anymore. Singing together is bonding together. No wonder we don't get along.

We Christians have long known that one of the only times you can count on singing is in a worship service. (And even then the people aren't necessarily going to be singing the sort of music one prefers, but that's another sermon.) A few Rotary clubs sing, but by and large, group singing is rare outside the sanctuary.

Lenore Skenazy recommends several things to cure this curse. One is to make singing a regular part of the school curriculum, and with a common repertoire. She laments the fact that her children all went to public school, yet, they don't know *My Country 'Tis of Thee* or *I've Been Working on the Railroad*.

When I went to school we had to take music class all the way through junior high. Not only did I learn the two above songs, but also "Benjamin Franklin, inventive was he, out in a storm with a kite and a key." As a kid I developed the habit of changing song lyrics to something crazier. This habit has stayed with me all my life. Last year I changed the lyrics of *The Little Old Lady From Pasadena* to *The Yodle Odle Lady From Pasadena*. I love the way that sounds when you say it as fast as you can. "Parked by her rickety old chalet is a brand new super stocked Chevrolet."

Lenore Skenazy also reminds us not to be intimidated by the professionals. It's silly to think you have to be great at singing to engage in it. Remember that when I was pastor the unforgivable sin according to the choir was for the sound guy not to mute my mike during a hymn.

The other day I placed an order by phone. The lady who took my order actually broke into song as she punched in the numbers. I asked her if she always sang on the phone. She laughed and said sometimes she did. And then when the order was complete, she told me to have a nice day. I said, "And you find something that makes you want to sing." She thanked me. – DJ