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Harmony, God and Us (Psalm 104)

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In the words of Paul McCartney and Stevie Wonder:

*Ebony and ivory, live together in perfect harmony,
Side-by-side on my piano keyboard,
Oh Lord, why don't we?*

In 1982 these potent lyrics struck a chord inside me in and are still resonating all these years later. Today this song has received about 20 thousand views on YouTube – a mere pittance compared to 'We are the World' with about 420 million views. Released in 1985 by a world charity super group, Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie's song We Are the World inspired many famous artists to participate for the African famine relief work, including Bruce Springsteen, Diana Ross, Tina Turner, Paul Simon, Billy Joel. I bet the memory brings a warm glow to more than a few hearts here.

These are songs about relationship, about harmony in relationship. Harmony is a concept that encompasses not just how we feel inside or how we relate to each other, but also can describe our relationship with our world, our relationship with creation, our relationship with God.

When Sarah invited me to speak on harmony and wholeness in this season of creation, I read and re-read Psalm 104 but kept getting stumped on parts of it, like '*giving drink to every wild animal*' and '*You cause the grass to grow for the cattle*'. What was speaking most loudly in my mind was disharmony!!! And I felt the heavy hand of responsibility that we've mucked it up with the environment, to say the least. I mean, how far from the Garden of Eden can we get? A friend of mine returned from Ireland recently – she says it's not green any more!

Then a verse from Meister Eckhart (below) came to mind, and it helped bridge the gap, on the journey back from the agony of separateness and disharmony that we can find ourselves in. Tonight, I'd like to explore with you the question 'How do we reconnect with God, and renew our relationship when it's us that has turned away and have developed a deaf ear?'

When I was the forest (Meister Eckhart 1260–1328)

When I was the stream, when I was the forest, when I was still the field, when I was every hoof, foot, fin and wing, when I was the sky itself,

no one ever asked me did I have a purpose, no one ever wondered was there anything I might need, for there was nothing I could not love.

It was when I left all we once were that the agony began, the fear and the questions came, and I wept, I wept. And tears I had not known before.

So I returned to the river, I returned to the mountains. I asked for their hand in marriage again, I begged – I begged to wed every object and creature, and when they accepted, God was ever present in my arms. And he did not say, 'Where have you been?'

For then I knew my soul – every soul – has always held Him

This poem, and Psalm 104, are proclamations of how we long for the world to be, for all to be well, for us to be restored to our connectedness with creation, for all to be harmonious. In Matthew 5:45 we read the words of Jesus *'My Father's sun shines on the good and the bad; his rain falls on the just and the unjust'* (and I add sheepishly, *'also the rain doesn't fall on the just and the unjust'*).

So what to do. Sure, it's appropriate that we see disharmony, and we need to face up to it. But the irony is, if we only focus on what's wrong, we've got fat chance of making any restoration.

Looking a little closer at what harmony is in musical terms. The earliest forms of music were simple melodies sung in churches and cathedrals to recite religious texts. When a few other notes are added to the simple melodies then depth and colour increases, and we have harmony – a joining, a fitting together, a communion. What's pleasant to the ear we consider harmony, otherwise it's disharmony, dissonant. Just thinking about a disharmonious sound makes me want to flinch, to protect my senses, my body – even to run away. It's a physical reaction at the very least. At the same time we can also feel the pull, the desire to resolve the dissonance, to finish the unfinished business.

Pythagoras was fascinated by music as an expression of divine harmony and described the Perfect fifth as an archetypal, divine perfection. One quote attributed to him is *'There is geometry in the humming of the strings, there is music in the spacing of the spheres'*. These early philosophers believed that the planets and stars each had their own distinctive note, with the pitch determined by their velocities spinning through space, giving the Harmony of the Spheres. Consider the idea that we each here have our own distinctive note or vibration and that gathering here together we create a particular, unique resonance. Contemporary thought says that nothing in this universe exists in isolation. Richard Rohr teaches we can only consider everything in relation to something else, to the 'other'. When we are feeling separate it's an 'I—It relationship'. When Grace is present, the relationship between us is one of 'I—Thou'.

In the way that the concept of yin and yang is one of perpetual movement toward the other, we move in and out of harmony: in our relationships, with each other, with the planet, with the divine. It is our nature to find ourselves striving – either trying too hard to help, or resisting like billy-o. There's another option somewhere between the two, that is, take comfort that no-matter how often we turn our face away, God is ever present, and does not ask *'Where have you been?'* We are already whole.

In our evening worship at Benedictus, our 'Before' and 'After' music helps us adjust to the contrast between the rest of our day and this sacred space in which we can make our connection to the divine our highest priority. We arrive into the space and the 'Before' song or music helps – like passing through a portal. We come from juggling a conglomeration of roles into the 'I-Thou relationship' into alignment with God. The 'After' song or music can be likened to a decompression chamber, preparing us to take our revitalised relationship out into our daily lives. And the space between the two is the opportunity to prioritise the

relationship with the Significant Other. Open, available, like in this evening's first song '*Here I Am, Lord. It is I Lord*', to listen with our hearts.

Some words from John O'Donohue:

'True listening is worship. With the sense of hearing, we listen to creation. One of the great thresholds in reality is the threshold between sound and silence. All good sounds have silence near them, behind and within them.' (O'Donohue J. (1997) *Anam Cara*. Bantam Books, p. 97).

To contemplate or pay attention to the natural world, on a mountain, by the ocean or in the desert can restore our sense of harmony. As will having a daily meditation practice, sitting in silence chanting a mantra, like we do here at Benedictus with Maranatha. Another method is to chant a simple sound, such as humming.

As a preparation for our regular meditation together, in a moment, I'll invite you all to practice the 'Humming Breath'. The practice is simply to hum on the out breath, softly and without force. Unlike when we sing together, we don't try to hit the same note, we don't even try to make a sound that is harmonious. In fact, if you find that you are 'trying' to make something happen in particular, relax, let go. It's a practice that is said to have many benefits including de-stressing, helping with insomnia, calming the mind for meditation, relaxing the digestive system, and is particularly beneficial in pregnancy (now there's a creative force!).

We'll do the humming practice twice, humming on the out breath for 5 or 10 breaths (~1 min), and then after a period of silence, we'll do it again and then continue into our regular meditation. (We'll ring the bell when that 15 min period of silence begins). Just like we prepare for meditation, sit up so the spine is gently elongated, relax the jaw, let the teeth be lightly apart. Breathe in, and then hum gently on the out breath, without forcing the sound...1 minute of silence...

Recognise that God's temple is within our own body, and as Richard Rohr invites us, '*Realise that it is God who is doing the loving, and we surrender ourselves to being channels and instruments of that Divine Flow in the world. We do not initiate the process: we only continue it.*' (Rohr R. (2018) *Daily Meditations* <<https://cac.org/category/daily-meditations>>).