

All The Stars Sang Together  
(Job 38:1,4a,6-7)

It was the first week of August, 40 years ago, yet so clear in my memory that it could just as easily been last night. Darkness has fallen. Outside everything is dark. Overhead arched laminated beams support a curved wooden ceiling. Only a ceiling, no walls. A chilly breeze comes in. Crickets chirp. The dirt floor is covered with sawdust. Around me a thousand young people and adults. They sit sitting on metal folding chairs which slope uncomfortably toward a concrete stage in the front. A man is standing on the stage, behind a podium. His face is brightly lit by the spotlights. In back the black night. He begins to pray. I don't remember the whole evening. Just this prayer, and not even the whole prayer—just one phrase of one sentence. It is a phrase out of the book of Job -- “when all the stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy.” A dark night, God's Spirit present and an auditorium filled young people. At least one of those young people wondered what kind of beautiful God could make “all the stars sing together, and all the sons of God shout for joy.”

“When all the stars sang together.” We were not there. We never will be there, but sometimes when we sing, it is as if God is bringing part of that experience into our lives. Singing can filled with great joy. I have always liked the song “Shine, Jesus, Shine”, even though I have it on good authority that the music itself is not that good. Still it conveys to me a sense of God's gracious, healing, brightening, overcoming presence. “The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” God's grace shines into the darkness of the world with a beauty that cannot be put out. It floods our lives with glory so much that are lives are changing from one degree of glory to another. Some music is joyful.

Some hymns, however, speak to the pain in our lives. Perhaps it is when joy is nowhere to be found that we most need songs of faith. It can give us strength—God's strength for us. When we are hurting, God's strength. When we are alone, God's strength. In the book of Job, Elihu asks Job why he doesn't look to God his maker, “who gives songs in the night”. God gives people songs in their darkest night. Songs in the night of distress. Songs in the night of sorrow. Songs in the night of abandonment or failure. When our world is crumbling and everything around us is falling, God is able to give us songs in the night.

Professors and pastors are often critical of songs whose theology seems to miss the mark. Tex Sample, Professor and author, was lecturing his class one day when he began making fun of the song, “In the Garden.” It was hopelessly individualistic, privatistic and full of escapist spirituality. He even launched into a nasal rendition purposely designed as a put-down. After class a thirty-five year old woman approached him and told this story. “Tex, my father started [abusing] me when I was eleven and he kept it up until I was sixteen and found the strength somehow to stop it. After every one of those ordeals I would go outside and sing that song to myself: “I go to the garden alone while the dew is still on the roses, and he walks with me and talks with me and he tells me I am his own.” Without that song I don't know how I could have survived. Tex, don't . . . you . . . ever . . . ever . . . make fun of that song in my presence again.”  
(*Ministry in an Oral Culture*, pp 78-79)

And then there are moments so horrible no songs can be sung. Remember the Psalmist's lament. "By the waters of Babylon we hung up our lyres and wept. Our tormentors said, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion.' How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" Some moments are too horrible. Do you think there was singing on the day Christ died? In my mind I picture the angels in heaven. They're all weeping.

Music celebrates the joy. On Easter Sunday we sing, "Jesus Christ is Risen today." Music weeps in sorrow. On Good Friday we remember the awful pain and sing

"Well might the sun in darkness hide  
and shut his glory in.

When God the mighty maker died  
for man the creature's sin."

Most of all music is offering our hearts in praise to God for his beauty and love. Christ died on the cross. The angels wept. Christ rose again. All heaven sang, and so do we.

No, we were not there when the stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy. We were not there, but God is here, today. God's presence is always with us, as close as our heart, closer than the air we breath. In him we know more joy than when all the stars sang together, and all God's children shouted praise. Let us pray.

God of grace, you have given us minds to know you, hearts to love you, and voices to sing your praise. Be so present with us and to us today that our lives may be transformed and we may celebrate your glory and worship you in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.