

Friends,

I have recently made a renewed commitment to sending out a "Sunday Synopsis" like I did last year up until the summertime. Hello to all our friends in Florida who may be reading this.

As some of you may already know, Rob Bowerman's father died this past Monday. We ask that you please keep Rob and his family in your prayers.

Sunday Synopsis

Today our focus is the interesting combination of "Folk Music Sunday" and "Evolution Sunday". We played with this connection in the Scripture Time with Children where we talked about the Big Bang and the evolving of plant and animal life on earth. We talked about God's involvement with the Big Bang showing God's power and intelligence to create our universe from nothing. The Scripture in Genesis imagines this as God causing this to happen with words, essentially commanding creation to come into being, "let there be light". We also talked about God's involvement with evolution through putting God's mind/intelligence into life through our DNA. How do we imagine "evolving through DNA"? I compared it to writing a song. We can think of the DNA of a song as containing: the type of song, the basic rhythm, and a key phrase. I mentioned the book by neuroscientist Daniel Levitin, "The World in Six Songs - How the Musical Brain Created Human Nature", as telling us that the six main types of songs in the world are songs of: Friendship, Joy, Comfort, Knowledge, Religion, Love. Then the children and I created the beginnings of a "Friendship Song".

Daniel Levitin's work is a very good resource for looking at the combination of music and evolution. He is a former rock musician turned neuroscientist, now at McGill University. Some of his training was at MIT. His other book on the subject of music and the brain is "This is Your Brain on Music". There is a quote on the front of the bulletin from his "Six Songs" book. This is the fuller context of that quote from preceding pages:

The primates that we *Homo Sapiens* are descended from are manifestly social species. But there are unpleasant by-products of being intensely social and interested in the comings and goings of others: strong rivalries, jealousies, challenges to dominance hierarchies, competition for food, and sexual selection competition for those mates that are perceived to be the most desirable (remember high school?). These social tensions are the primary reason that nonhuman primates are rarely known to travel in groups larger than a few dozen-the social order simply cannot be maintained in larger assemblies.

But larger living groups, if they can be formed and maintained, confer several significant advantages. First, larger groups are likely to be more successful at repelling outside invaders. In a hunter-gatherer society, in which foodstuffs are often difficult to find and secure, the risks of any individual coming home empty-handed are diluted through the actions of many dozens or hundreds of hunter-gatherers; with cooperation, a given individual may come home empty-handed today, but full-armed tomorrow- in either case, the supplies are shared. (p. 48-49)

How did we humans manage to relieve the social tensions that were necessary for the creation of larger living groups-numbering in the hundreds-and ultimately of society and civilization?

(The quote from the bulletin)

I believe that *synchronuous, coordinated song and movement* were what created the strongest bonds between early humans, or protohumans, and these allowed for the formation of larger living groups, and eventually of society as we know it. Throughout our evolutionary history, music and dance typically co-occurred (p. 50). Singing together releases oxytocin, a neurochemical now known to be involved in establishing bonds of trust (p. 51).

For me, the role of music in human evolution helps me to better grasp how evolution came about, especially in regard to the human species. I have always struggled to deal with the concept that human beings evolved from primates, even though I have accepted the scientific facts that this is the truth. Music-making seems to be so much of what it means to "be human", so it makes sense that it is what helped our brain develop on a different path from our primate forebears. Music has been an integral part of our Judeo-Christian tradition. Many of the Psalms were sung as part of temple worship and they have played a key role in shaping our particular faith and our particular moral tradition. Group singing just seems to make us "more human". It is sad that today we more often listen to music than make music. It was common up until recently for people to sing whenever they were in groups, as a family, with friends, as social groups. Although with the Morse Pond school video for No Guff Week (Lean on Me), mentioned in the Children's Time, and television shows like "Glee" and singing "flashmobs," we may be returning to doing more spontaneous singing as part of our social life. And that would be good. Now, not all scientists give music this much credit. For example, the well-known scientist, Steven Pinker, does not agree with Daniel Levitin on this, but we have to each make up our own mind when we read the writings of scientists.

Now we turn to our Scripture for today in light of this discussion of music and evolution, which is Ephesians 4:11-16. This passage leads us into a discussion of the "creative evolving" of the church of Jesus Christ. In one way we might think of Christianity as just "evolving" from the Jewish faith tradition, an example might be our continuing to use the Psalms as a guide for prayer. But there are other parts of our tradition which speak of Jesus bringing about "new creation", essentially a revolutionary "re-starting" of the tradition. We think of 2 Corinthians 5:17 in terms of Jesus' impact on individuals, "If anyone is in Christ they are a new creation, behold the old has passed away and the new has come". The Scriptures also speak of the church that Jesus brought into being by his life, death, and resurrection as essentially being a "new creation", we can think of the Spirit coming on Pentecost as being like a "Big Bang". An example of this is Paul's imagery of the church as the body of Christ, here in Ephesians and also in Romans and in Corinthians. This is completely new imagery for a religious community. There is no other organization of any kind that uses this kind of imagery. Even though the DNA of the church may be similar to other faith communities and other non-profit organizations in many ways, our DNA has unique elements that make us substantially different. The more we pay attention to our unique DNA, the more fully we will "evolve" into the fullness of our unique organizational identity.

The DNA in this "body concept of the church" includes the idea that:

1. the church body is integrally connected to the leadership of Jesus as "the head" of the body. We are always seeking to listen and follow, by learning about his teaching in the Scriptures and seeking the inspiration of the Spirit
2. the primary function of its leaders is to "up-build the body" by "equipping them for the work of ministry." Everyone is to be involved in continuing the servant ministry of Jesus in this world, it's not something that just the leaders do.
3. since we are all "ministers", everyone takes part in the overall growth process of the church, so that it more fully reflects the ministry of Jesus into our world.
4. the primary pattern for our social gathering and connecting, which enables the church body to grow, is "speaking the truth in love".

This phrase has three key words. We are to "speak" to one another in church life, always seeking to have good conversations about important subjects. We are to speak in a way that is "truth-full", seeking to be as accurate as possible in our descriptions and telling of the story. We are to speak the truth from a heart attitude of love, always seeking to be respectful of people and grounded in God's love. These three words can be moved around and they basically communicate the same thing. For example, we can say "in love, we speak the truth" or "speaking in love, we express the truth".

"Speaking the truth in love" is not an easy thing to do. It is a higher level dimension of our DNA than the first three, upon which it is dependent, and it something that few other organizations aspire to. Thank God for music. It is a tremendous help in our evolving into this way of interacting with one another. We think of the songs we have sung today at the beginning of worship, such as "What a Friend We Have in Jesus", which grounds us in our friendship with God and each other, and "Love God with Your Heart and Your Neighbor as Yourself" and our song that we will sing as a closing song today, which we have been using as our Call to Worship song "Weave, weave, weave us together..."

In the summer we pioneered an interactive service involving the heart-felt sharing of prayer joys and prayer concerns and responses to a sermon question. I believe it worked well because we also added new music, "simple summer songs" which helped us to go into a deeper sharing of our friendship with God and with each other. The three songs that set the tone for our sharing were:

**Creative God of Life... of Love... of Joy,
We worship you.**

**We turn away from all that hurts and destroys...
...covers the truth
...that oppresses our lives.
We turn to you.**

**You are the God of new beginnings
...fresh hope,
...resurrection
Your love sets a new tone
Spirit release in us
...revive in us
...renew in us
Make us strong in your ways.**

As we continue in our journey of "creative evolving" as the body of Christ, let us keep looking for the songs that will help us along the way, and even be open to writing new songs, whoever may feel the call.