

“Eight Wonders of Life: Music”
1 Samuel 16:14-23

Let's take a short journey into the life of a man who had so much potential. He was selected to be the leader of his country. He had every intention of serving with honor, dignity, and faith. He even was anointed and blessed by the religious leader of his country reminding him that he was chosen by the people and blessed by God to lead and to serve his people. His nation had seen a lot of turmoil under tribal leadership. The whole future of his nation depended on his faithfulness. It was a lot of pressure but also a lot of potential. He seemed like the perfect person for the job and he believed that he was in it for service. Now, there was always an undercurrent of warning to the people not to appoint a king as the absolute power of a king would corrupt whoever got into that position. And that is exactly what happened in this story.

We are talking about King Saul. King Saul became the first king of Israel. Even though God did not want the people of ancient Israel to have a king, they insisted on having one. Saul was selected by the prophet Samuel for the job. He had all the qualifications for the job. He was young, tall, handsome, and faithful. But the job was demanding. It required complete faithfulness to God and dedication to serving the people. The job description of the king was designed to be very different from the job description of the other kings in the surrounding area. The people of ancient Israel were God's chosen people who were supposed to show how faithful people run their affairs with justice, peace, and compassion. The job of the king of Israel was not given with absolute power. The job had a lot of restrictions on it. According to Deuteronomy 17, the king was supposed to carry out the system of governance. There was another branch for their government which was the judicial branch. The king was not supposed to make up new laws or rules. The king was called to ensure that the Law that was given to Moses was properly applied and practiced. He was supposed to keep the Law himself. The king was supposed to keep a copy of the Law before himself all the time and to read from it daily. The king was not supposed to have too much wealth to make himself too powerful or exulted above others. In other words, the job description of the king clearly defined his obligation to serve God's Law and not to see the position as a privilege. That was the job Saul was called to do. At first Saul was faithful, but over time, power and privilege got to him. In fact, he wanted all the power to reside in him alone. He did not want to work for the people. He wanted the people to work for him. This seemed like a good idea at first. Enjoying his power and oppressing the people seemed like a good deal. But this had a profoundly disturbing effect on him. Let's listen to what happened to him according to 1 Samuel 16:14:

¹⁴Now the spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him.

Saul's crooked ways turned on him. His abuse of power, which he thought would bring him joy and happiness, ended up tormenting him. We can relate to those feelings of being tormented inwardly when we seek all the things that do not satisfy our souls. When our priorities or the priorities of those around us shift to control, power, security, or esteem,

the dreams for our lives often turn into nightmares: Our jobs become burdens, our families become sources of pain, and even our sense of wholeness and joy may turn into dust. Think of the many victims of hate, violence, or exploitation. Consider how many of us struggle to even accept ourselves or to feel truly connected to God and to all of life all the time.

In his book *Let Your Life Speak: Listening For The Voice of Vocation*, Quaker teacher and theologian Parker Palmer notes that, "We arrive in this world with birthright gifts — then we spend the first half of our lives abandoning them or letting others disabuse us of them. As young people, we are surrounded by expectations that may have little to do with who we really are, expectations held by people who are not trying to discern our selfhood but to fit us into slots...driven by fear, too often [we] betray true self to gain the approval of others. We are disabused of original giftedness in the first half of our lives. Then — if we are awake, aware, and able to admit our loss — we spend the second half trying to recover and reclaim the gift we once possessed."

Awe is our way out of these prisons because it helps us to realign ourselves with the magnitude and grandeur of life and of God. We will continue our Bible reading for today to see how that worked for King Saul according to 1 Samuel 16:15-23

¹⁵And Saul's servants said to him, 'See now, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. ¹⁶Let our lord now command the servants who attend you to look for someone who is skillful in playing the lyre; and when the evil spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will feel better.' ¹⁷So Saul said to his servants, 'Provide for me someone who can play well, and bring him to me.' ¹⁸One of the young men answered, 'I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the LORD is with him.' ¹⁹So Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, 'Send me your son David who is with the sheep.' ²⁰Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine, and a kid, and sent them by his son David to Saul. ²¹And David came to Saul, and entered his service. Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer. ²²Saul sent to Jesse, saying, 'Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my sight.' ²³And whenever the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand, and Saul would be relieved and feel better, and the evil spirit would depart from him.

Music in this case was the source of awe that reconnected Saul to the Spirit of God and to the peace that passes all understanding. It is especially interesting that David was the one who played the music for Saul. In the verses just before our passage for today, we are told that David had been anointed by the prophet Samuel to be the next king of Israel. He was the one to replace King Saul. Yet, he is also the one who ends up playing the music that helped heal Saul's broken spirit. David was ready to share the gift of music, even with a corrupt and self-absorbed king. The language of music was the common bond the two of them shared despite the political and spiritual divisions between them.

Music has that kind of power for us. Music can help us move from our small selves to feel deep and powerful connections to others and to God. Music has been essential in worship

throughout history because people can remember the words of the scriptures better when they are sung. They also feel transported into a higher level of being.

In his book *Awe*, Dacher Keltner writes, “Musical awe embraces us in community...For Yumi, music is a symbolic medium of awe. It is where we express and understand together what is vast and mysterious, and how we make sense of the wonders of life...Music surrounds us in a cashmere blanket of sound.” There are physical, communal, spiritual, and psychological connections that are made for us through music.

No matter what your musical taste might be, there is great power in listening to music or playing music with others which moves us beyond the worries, fears, and conflicts of our world. This is much needed in our world today.

Consider the powerful story of Vedran Smailovic, who during the Bosnian War (1992-1995) brought so much healing through his music. According to the *Sarajevo Times*, “On the afternoon of May 27, 1992, mortar shells hit a group of people waiting to buy bread in a market in Sarajevo. Twenty-two people were killed and more than 70 were injured. Vedran Smailovic, a well-known cellist of the city, saw it and was deeply disturbed. The next day he came to the spot, by then covered with flowers as tribute, and began to play his cello. He had not planned this, but he did it instinctively, and as people gathered around him, there was a sense of healing. He continued to play there for 22 days, honoring the 22 killed, playing the same piece, Albinoni’s *Adagio in G minor*. There were snipers on the hills, and the cellist could have been killed at any time, but he played on. For another two years, he played at different places in the city, in the midst of ruined buildings, dressed in a white shirt and black tailcoat, as if he was playing on the stage in an orchestra. Soon he became a symbol of courage for Sarajevo, and for the whole world. People called him mad, but he responded that it was the war that was mad. Inspired by him, classical and other music was composed, books were written, and other artists and musicians came to Sarajevo. There are more than 20 books, films, plays, and songs, on the siege, as well as video games.”

[Remembering Sarajevo with the cello | CNN](#)

Prayer

God of harmony,
you give us music rich in variety,
to connect us with you and all creation.
We thank you for inspiring poets and musicians
who bring praise to our lips.
Help us embrace the harmonies of your creative genius;
Let your hope, faith, love, and joy
resound in us and ring throughout the earth.
Fill us with the rhythm of your heartbeat
in your symphony of being
as it guides and nurtures us
in mission with you.

We pray in the name of Christ, the singer and the song.
Amen.