

Friends of the Center

What Moves God's People to a Worshipful Experience?

As the deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God (Ps. 42:1)

I believe that we are born with a hunger for God that will not be quenched until some experience touches us deeply. It seems to me that when our hearts are attentive and tuned towards God, just about everything around us: Creation, music, stories of God's deliverance, testimonies of the faithful, our own experiences, happy or sad will deeply touch our hearts and lead us into a personal or corporate worship experience with our Creator.

How many times have we been touched by a song or a hymn which speaks to the beauty of God's creation, or when we see the beautiful sunset colors in the sky, and we are not in awe of the divine Creator?

How many times during our corporate worship have we been touched by a prayer, song or hymn which speaks to our immediate need and is like a balm to our soul? When the congregation sings with their hearts and minds raised to God, to quote the words in a traditional Caribbean song, *Amazing wonders* take place. John Wesley reminds us in his *Directions for Singing*, The United Methodist Hymnal: *Above all, sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing.*

Alejo Hernández, a former Catholic seminarian from Mexico who was disenchanted with the Catholic Church came into the U.S. through Brownsville, TX, on a rainy night. He had heard about the Bible and came looking for one. To get out of the rainstorm he went into a church and sat on the back pew. When the congregation began singing, he couldn't understand a single word, but he said:

I felt that God's Spirit was there, although I could not understand a single word, I felt my heart strangely warmed. Never did I hear an organ play so sweetly, never did people look so beautiful as on that occasion. I went away weeping for joy.¹

When we seek expectantly, God provides.

A congregation need not necessarily sing with traditional, religious music. We praise God with different music styles, different rhythms, according to one's tradition, using various musical instruments. We worship God with our voice, our body, our mind. We become a richer, worshipful community when we join and praise God in all

¹ Alfredo Nañez, History of the Rio Grande Conference of the United Methodist Church

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tongues, all colors, all traditions.

The song *De Colores / Sing of Colors*, a traditional Mexican song used for various celebrations has been used in rallies of The United Farmworkers of America and is used increasingly in Hispanic/Latino congregations. It also appears as a psalm setting.

Let everything that breathes praise the Lord - Psalm 150:6

Several years ago, my husband and I took a group to the Holy Land. On a certain day we were celebrating a Service of Renewal of the Baptismal Vows by the edge of the Jordan River. As we renewed our vows we were singing *Amazing Grace*. Just at that moment a flock of birds lined up in perfect formation flew over the river as they loudly made their own music. I felt, as many others did, that the birds were joining us in praising God with our songs.

Sometimes God speaks to us personally and unexpectedly, in good or bad times, wherever we may be. These are occasions that move us to praise God. If we really pay attention to our surroundings, with open hearts and open minds and open ears, we can see and hear God in our midst. God is always trying to get our attention. As the song says, *amazing wonders* will happen when we listen.

– Raquel Martínez