

HEARTBEATS-Staying Connected 4-10-21



Dear Friends in Christ,

Traditional, non-traditional, historic, contemporary, ancient, modern—these are all terms by which we classify our worship hymns/songs. Let me add one more: familiar. Familiar may be a better classification when we’re talking about what we want or expect in worship. We may say, “I like more modern music,” or “I want the historic hymns,” but what we really mean is, “I prefer the songs that are familiar to me.”

Every church I have served has their own collection of worship music that they know and are used to. One church even cut a song out of a previous hymnal and glued it into the back cover of the current hymnal so that they could sing it as the closing hymn every Sunday. In every church I’ve served, some have said to me as a relatively new pastor there, “Why don’t you pick songs from the hymnal?” when that is precisely what I had been doing. I just hadn’t been choosing the hymns with which they were familiar. Being new, I didn’t know what their collection of familiar songs was. Whether it is contemporary or traditional, we prefer the music that we have come to know and love.

We are blessed at St. Andrew to be able to have two different styles of worship with two different types of Christian music. But the music offered at one service, while popular with those who attend that service, is likely not favored by those who attend the other service. That was just fine until the pandemic. Then, because we can't offer a blended service each week (challenges with setting up equipment for both sets of musicians), we made the decision to alternate who plays each week. That means that every other week, the music you hear is likely not to be as high on your favorites chart as it is on the alternate week.

Some years ago, I served a congregation as one of two pastors. After having been there for about four years, a member told me how much he liked my preaching. So much so, he said, that he called the church office each week to find out who was preaching. If it wasn't me, he didn't come. I told him how fortunate we were to have two pastors with two different styles of preaching to appeal to a wider range of people. How wonderful that people would sacrifice their choice every other week so that others would get to have their preferred preaching style. And on alternate weeks, how marvelous that people would graciously "endure" a preaching style that was not the one to which they were partial so that, again, someone else would get to hear what they liked. The bottom line should always be, not the style, but the message itself.

The same is true for our worship music right now. Though we may prefer one type of music, we can be grateful that, when the songs aren't what we would choose, we can know that it is uplifting for others. Our gift to them can be our tolerance for that of which we are less fond, so they can have the joy of their preference, and then, we can be grateful for their tolerance of our favorites on alternate weeks. Again, what matters most is not the style of music, but the message that is communicated and how God is speaking to us through that music.

In Christ's love,

Pastor Jeffrey