

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

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Dear friends in Christ:

As I write this it is Canada Day, but it doesn't feel like any Canada Day that I remember. No fireworks, no big musical extravaganza and celebration in Ottawa, no crowds. In fact, I had forgotten that it even was Canada Day until I was reminded last evening. For me it's just another day and I had my work all planned out. Well, by rights, should I even be writing a Pastoral Letter on a holiday?

It is not just Canada Day that feels different. Most things feel different this summer with our usual plans put on hold. No one has any travel plans. "Staycation", while not recognized by my spell checker, is a reality for almost all of us this year.

For us as Christians, one of the big changes has been our relationship to our church buildings. For many people Christianity is all about a building but God seems to have been moving us away from dependence on our buildings in 2020. Churches and sanctuaries are still there, but very few are getting used. For us at St. Andrew's, whether this letter is delivered to your home or is arriving in your "inbox", church has been more about a different kind of worship than we have been used to before.

For me, one of the biggest things I deal with each week is music. Music was once just a matter of picking hymns. Not anymore. I have had to develop a theology and practice of worship music in order that I can provide appropriate hymns for the online services.

What a range of styles and quality of music is available for me to choose from. I thought that today I would just share with you a little of the process I use in picking hymns. Following in the footsteps of our beloved organist and choir director Ann Savage, I picked the first hymn for what I hope will be a good introduction to the service and we will sing it for the whole month. It is a good way to learn new hymns. Last month we started with a hymn by a group called CityAlight. (More about them later.) It is a very simple hymn that works for both children and adults. This month we begin with **Above All** by Michael W. Smith. It is a very worshipful hymn.

For the second piece I try to pick one of the great worship hymns of the church. It is important that we remember these great hymns with their strong theological content. They have stood the test of time and when we sing them we stand with fellow Christians who have sung them, sometimes for centuries. Having said that, this week's hymn – **Be Still For The Presence of The Lord** – only dates from 1986 but does a good job of calling us to reverent worship.

"... a place to belong!"

For the Ministry of Music I try to show case an important hymn. It may be something that was written recently or something old which features a soloist backed by a large choir and sometimes an orchestra. This week's selection is none of these things. It is an old hymn that dates from 1796. **Praise The Lord! Ye Heavens Adore Him** is familiar to us. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_v70rhDwfA) This rendition is performed by The Chancel Choir of First United Methodist Church of Dallas. However, I chose instead a selection by a group called Young Oceans. All the words from the original hymn are there but the music is very different. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sx9I_amxyCA) You may not like the music, but it takes historic words and sets them to music that speaks to a new generation.

The hymn before the sermon, Amy Grant's familiar **Thy Word Is A Lamp Unto My Feet**, could double as a Prayer for Illumination.

The hymn after the sermon, **Yet Not I But Through Christ in Me**, is by CityAlight which I mentioned earlier. This is a worship band that I have really come to appreciate. If you would like to read more about them then click on the following link for a full article. (<https://www.challies.com/interviews/get-to-know-cityalight-and-their-new-album/>) Arising out of a church called St. Paul's Castle Hill in Sydney, Australia, the aim of CityAlight is to write songs with biblically rich lyrics and simple melodies for the Christian church to sing. I really appreciate that. This is hymn music that has strong theological content that is not meant to be performed, but to be sung even in small congregational settings. This is not chorus music with a vaguely familiar pop/soft rock sound. This is serious, beautiful, joyful yet simple Christian hymnody.

CityAlight does not churn out contemporary music in a few hours. They can spend up to twelve weeks working on a song to get it right. I quote: "Certain songs just take time and work and reworking and meditation and reworking and discussion. Theology is rich and deep and our songs need to grapple with that. It is unlikely (though not impossible, it must be said) that a writer could dash off a song about God's sovereignty or the mystery of suffering in an hour or two." Listen to this hymn and you will be able to see this work in practice. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zundjUFazfg&feature=youtu.be>

For our closing hymn I have chosen an older hymn. **May the Mind of Christ My Saviour** is played by a single guitarist who also sings it. I trust that it speaks to your heart. This young man said he couldn't bring himself to leave out a single verse, so he plays them all! I trust that our worship today is truly worshipful, even though it embraces many different styles of music. What is important is that what we sing brings praise and glory to our King.

Your servant in Christ,
Rev. Stephen Dunkin
Loch Mor
Big Rideau Lake

"... a place to belong!"