



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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March 2, 2008

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Choir

Jeremy Belter, President of the Chorus

Let All Rejoice Who Have a Voice to Raise

My name is Jeremy Belter. I am the President of the Seminary Chorus, a Senior at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, and on behalf of the Seminary Chorus and our Director, Professor Tiefel, I want to thank you for coming to our concert this morning.

Let All Rejoice Who Have a Voice to Raise—that's the theme of our tour program this year. It's a line taken from the hymn we just sang, When In Our Music God Is Glorified, a hymn written in 1971 by a Methodist minister named Fred Pratt Green. In that hymn, Reverend Green highlights the importance God's people had placed on singing in their worship services. God's people love to speak about the wonderful things that God has done for us through Jesus Christ. And singing offers us a unique vehicle to do just that, because it is a vehicle that we put a lot of importance on. It's a vehicle that we are very familiar with. We tie singing and songs to events in life that are deeply emotional.

Shortly after airplanes crashed into the twin World Trade Center Towers, the song God Bless America found its way into the seventh inning stretch of every major league baseball game for several years after that tragic event.

Parents, can you remember some of the first lullabies that you sang to that newborn you just brought home with you from the hospital? Children, do you remember some of those cute little songs mom and dad would teach you? Songs like Jesus Loves Me, This I Know and even a song about Mary and her little lamb.

We even enjoy singing on Friday afternoon, turning the radio volume up a couple of notches, singing along to our favorite song, emotionally charged up because the work week is over with and the weekend is here. Singing is something we do. We do it intentionally and we do it spontaneously.

Christians sing as well. The history of the church in the Old and New Testament documents this for us time and time again. The Old Testament has an entire book devoted to hymns. It is called the Book of Psalms. Our Lord Jesus enjoyed singing songs and hymns and psalms. Reverend Green noted that in the fourth verse of the hymn we just sang, And did not Jesus sing a psalm that night When utmost evil strove against the light? Yes, even on the night Jesus was going to be betrayed by one of his own disciples he was singing a song of praise to his God.

Even the Lutheran church from its very beginning received the nickname "the singing church" because of its vigorous and joyous singing. So today we fill our worship services with hymns and songs and anthems.

But why—why do we sing? I think Mary, the mother of our Lord, said it best in Luke 1 in her song of praise—*"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant"* (Luke 1:46-48). The question is not why do we sing? The question is; how can we not sing when we consider all the great things that God has done for us? Because face it, if God did not break into this world compelled by his undying love that would not see us lost, we would not be raising a voice to rejoice; rather a cry as we die.

God's law does not paint a pretty picture of our condition. It speaks of a heart and life that is opposed to God's Will and bent on breaking every one of his commands. Far from being a relatively unspoiled beach of sanctity and purity, our heart is the fortress from which we launch our rebellion against God and our neighbor.

But where death is deserved, life has been lavished. Where rejection is expected, reconciliation has been made. The good news about what God has done for us through his Son, Jesus Christ, far outweighs any bad news we deserve. What we could not do, God has done for us through Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ God reveals his full and free love to the world. He reconciled us to himself by doing for us what we could not do. He endured the judgment and the punishment we deserved for not having done his will and God clothed us in the perfect righteous life of his own Son so that we, as children of God, stand before the Father in heaven redeemed and forgiven. The good news is the unfathomable richness of our new life with God, reconciled while we were still enemies, made alive while we were spiritually dead, brought near even while we were strangers, and made coheirs of his estate given citizenship in heaven, a hope for the future even though we had hated him.

So we sing, we rejoice, we sing out loud and we sing in our heart. We sing with excellent voices and we sing with not-so-excellent voices, but all of our praise is a beautiful sounding tune in the ears of our God because it flows from a heart of faith that trusts in the Lord Jesus' redeeming work.

The men in the Seminary Chorus feel very strongly about singing about Christ. That is why we traveled here to Zion in Morrison to present the gospel to you in song. We even feel so strongly about proclaiming the good news of Jesus that we enrolled at your Seminary, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. We enrolled so that one day, God willing, we might receive an assignment as a pastor to serve a congregation such as yours. As we continue along that path of preparation, please keep the students and the professors in your thoughts and your prayers. And as the Lord moves you and as you have opportunity, support the Seminary and all of our ministry training schools. These are the training grounds for your future pastors and teachers, full-time proclaimers of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps there are some young men in your congregation or in your family whom you have identified as wonderful, excellent candidates for the ministry. Perhaps there are some young people who you see as excellent teachers in our classrooms. Identify them and encourage them. Encourage them to think about it. And if you've ever thought about being a pastor, if you've ever thought about being a teacher, then I want you to

introduce yourself to me after the concert, or to one of the other members of the Chorus. We are easy to identify. We are the guys with the blue robes on. Ask us what it's all about. Ask us what we learn at the Seminary and why we decided to go there.

Whatever age you are, ask yourself, might the Lord use me to proclaim his gospel as a full-time minister? But whether you serve the Lord as a full-time minister of the gospel or not, that doesn't stifle the praise that the Lord has put on our lips, does it? Wherever God has given you the ability to serve, there you can be a mouthpiece of proclamation about the great things that God has done for us. You can speak about Jesus when you are at that afternoon playgroup with your kids. You can speak about Jesus at the diner over your morning coffee. You can speak about Jesus on the bus to and from school. And yes, you can speak about Jesus when you are sitting around your kitchen table with your family.

Let every part of our life be tuned to praise—praise that proclaims the good news of Jesus Christ so that one day all may rejoice who have a voice to raise!