

Beautiful Savior



Unfortunately, today will be the final Sunday with our beloved Robin Crawford leading us with her musical gifts. For several years, she has filled this sanctuary not just with notes, but with hope. Whenever we find our seat in the pews with so much on our hearts and minds, some of which we may not have shared with those sitting around us, Robin would do her own ministry of healing, of grace, of new life, no matter how frustrated or down-in-the-dumps we might have been that particular day. No matter what, the notes of God's persistent love would flow from the organ pipes into the depths of our very soul.

Now, the hymns that Robin has played over the years were often chosen by our worship and music ministry team, but it was safe to say there would be a few constants on certain days throughout the church calendar year. On Reformation Sunday, there was always going to be "A Mighty Fortress." On Christmas Eve, we were always going to sing "Silent Night." On Easter, I would always pick "Now All the Vault of Heaven Resounds" for the hymn of the day. And each and every time, no matter how much we sang the same songs, Robin brought the music to life as if we were hearing it for the first time.

Except, today, we had Robin pick all the hymns, including the one we will sing shortly, "Beautiful Savior." Yes, we know we have a "beautiful Savior," to say the least, in Jesus Christ, but over and over again, we need the music to help us truly believe it, to feel it to our very core, to make it absolutely certain to even frustrated or down-in-the-dumps us in the pews on whatever Sunday, that yes, this most "beautiful Savior," is for us, too.

It is a hymn that is not only a favorite of many in our Covenant family, but numerous children of God throughout the world. In fact, when I was a with a congregation for my year of seminary internship, I heard a most baffling story about this song. Evidently, the people loved it so much that only a few decades earlier, the pastor and other leaders of the church made the decision to sing "Beautiful Savior" as the sending hymn every single Sunday. Not just once a year on a festive occasion, not just once a month; but for years on end, every single Sunday, they sang "Beautiful Savior" to conclude their worship together. And trust me, this was the kind of congregation with members who did not hesitate to voice their opinion even against the esteemed pastor. Evidently, the music did not get old for them. Evidently, the notes of healing and grace and new life; the Gospel as proclaimed in "Beautiful Savior" never got old for them. And I wonder if the most powerful verse of all is the second one: "Fair are the meadows, fair are the woodlands, robed in flow'rs of blooming spring; Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer, he makes our sorrowing spirit sing."

After all, music isn't just about healing us after a bad week. So many of the hymns we sing are about empowering us to go forth and be messengers of that healing and grace and new life in Jesus Christ. And I have a feeling that's why that congregation insisted on singing "Beautiful Savior" as their sending hymn every single Sunday for years on end, as if the notes from those organ pipes were giving them the needed spiritual boost to go out believing that they were called to be disciples of Christ for the sake of the world. To give them another essential round of Holy Spirit-nourishment that they may share the Gospel with those at Sunday brunches or in the

grocery store or at work or in their homes, as if those relentless notes of God's love from inside the sanctuary could truly reach beyond the walls, throughout the world.

So, yes, today, we give thanks for our beloved Robin Crawford. So much so that we add another line to the beatitudes that we heard this morning. We say blessed are the musicians who bring the Gospel to life more beautifully than words alone can pull off. We say blessed are the musicians who make us believe that the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek; they, in fact, are blessed. Blessed are the musicians who make us believe that's indeed true. Blessed are the musicians who make hope soar to sanctuary rafters and can still reach us in the depths of our soul. Blessed are the musicians who help us realize that this "Beautiful Savior" is for us, too. Blessed are the musicians who make us understand that this Great News never gets old to hear and speak and even sing. Blessed are the musicians who bring the beauty of God to life for us over and over again. So, for Robin, for all the faithful artists of every kind throughout the world, who will always insist on revealing to us that nothing will ever separate us from the most beautiful love of God in Jesus Christ, our Lord, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!