

# What was I thinking?

November 14, 2021



## Keeping it simple

This is an interesting time in the church year. We just had some “big” Sundays with Reformation Sunday and All Saints’ Sunday. More significant days and seasons will come soon, including Christ the King Sunday, which also happens to be our Commitment Sunday and the Sunday before Thanksgiving, then we begin the season of Advent, which will lead to Christmas before we know it. We don’t have a Thanksgiving service here, but for me, Stewardship Commitment brings to mind the gathering of the harvest, giving thanks to God for it, and offering to God the firstfruits of that harvest. There are so many great hymns and other music on that theme. I like to acknowledge the occasion in some way. I’ll write more about that next week.

We are still in what is often called “ordinary time.” We might think that means ordinary as opposed to special, but ordinary/ordinal/ordered actually means that we’re counting the days, as we have been since Pentecost. This Sunday will be the twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost.

It’s not hard to choose music for the big Sundays, when we pull out all the stops (no organ pun intended - I never literally pull out all the stops. It’s not a pretty sound). *A Mighty Fortress* and some Bach get us through Reformation Sunday, and *For All the Saints* and a trumpeter make it All Saints’. This Sunday we’re back to the Narrative Lectionary and the book of Amos, who said “let justice roll down.” Amos said we should “Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate.”

We hear a lot about justice these days but what does it mean? Too many times it seems to be punishment for those who disagree with us. Somehow, I don't think that's really what God wants.

Amos also said, "I hate, I despise your festivals," and "Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps." Those aren't words a church musician wants to hear! When I read that, it makes me think we should keep the organ turned off and give the choir the day off.

For guidance, we might turn to the Ten Commandments. They seem to spell out what's right and wrong. I heard an Episcopal priest explain a simpler way, though not necessarily an easier one. Jesus was asked which commandment is the greatest. He replied, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." Then he said, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." As that priest explained, if we do those things – love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and love our neighbors as ourselves, everything else will take care of itself. If we truly love God and neighbor, and not forget who our neighbor is, especially those less fortunate than we are, we will do what is right and just.

This Sunday's anthem is a beautiful text set to music by Andrew Carter, a contemporary English composer. To me, this text is a reminder of what we need to pray if we want to love God with heart, soul, and mind:

God be in my head and in my understanding,  
God be in mine eyes and in my looking,  
God be in my mouth and in my speaking,  
God be in my heart and in my thinking,  
God be at mine end and at my departing.

If God is in your head, eyes, mouth, and heart, God will be in everything you do in your life.

There is a prayer that we learn and say in most of our singing choirs here. We pray this on most Sunday mornings and in rehearsals. I encourage choir members of all ages to memorize this prayer and to really think about the words. It reminds us to really think about the words we sing in every hymn, every response, and every anthem, and consider what they mean. Do we believe the words we sing? Does that show in how we live our lives in and outside of our church?

In music there is a danger of singing or playing all the right notes, but not making any music. We need to make music. We can also sing words, but forget to sing expressive

poetry and prayers. We need to pay attention to what we're singing, or Amos will be right about the "noise of our songs." We need to love God with heart, soul, and mind, and love our neighbors as ourselves. Then it will show in our lives.

### ***The Choristers' Prayer***



*Bless, O Lord, us thy servants,  
Who minister in thy temple;  
Grant that what we sing with our lips,  
We may believe in our hearts,  
And what we believe in our hearts,  
We may show forth in our lives;  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*

God be with you till we meet again.

John