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## **“It Takes a Choir”**

**A meditation by Marilyn T. Hedgpeth**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent (Lessons and Carols; Year C)**

**December 13, 2015**

**Isaiah 12:1–6**

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One of my favorite new TV shows is a series on the USA Network called

“It Takes a Choir.”

The show features young British choir director, Gareth Malone,

who believes in the power of singing to bring people together

to work towards a common goal.

On the first show, he traveled to the Fort Hood Army Base in Texas

to build a choir of spouses left behind while their

loved ones serve the nation in secrecy or in overseas operations.

This remnant of mostly wives and some husbands are the ones left behind

to raise the children, to honor an empty place at the table,

and to keep prayer and hope alive for those serving on death’s doorstep.

This remnant lives in constant anxiety that something bad might befall their loved ones.

They live in constant hypervigilance with the weight of responsibility

for all matters, good and bad, on the home front.

And they live in constant incompleteness that somehow their family is out of balance

without their significant other in the picture.

This remnant reminded me, in a way, of the lost boys in *Peter Pan*

who fall out of their prams when their nannies aren’t looking

and who can never seem to find themselves,

having been separated from their families.

Into this context of anxiety, hyper-vigilance, incompleteness, and lostness (in a way),

Gareth Malone steps up and pulls together a choir.

He steps up and joins them first by acknowledging and naming their separation anxiety

and pain of apartness, and then pulls together this group of isolated individuals

to make beautiful music together in one voice.

It's a labor of love on his part because these are not trained musicians.

But Malone works with them and teaches them to sing in four-part harmony.

And he pulls individuals from the group, those who need a little TLC,

extra attention, and a boost of self-esteem,

and gives them prime solo parts in the pieces.

And lo and behold, by concert day, they are a choir, and they make beautiful music.

On this particular show, the network piped in the missing spouses from Afghanistan

where they are serving to be part of the audience,

and everyone is part of the show.

But that's the whole point that Gareth Malone is trying to make:

sometimes it takes a choir, or it takes music, to make everyone part of the show.

His show is about the unitive power of song, about the unitive power of music,

of which we are a part and a witness today.

The prophet Isaiah sings his message to the children of Israel:

after the anger of the Lord against Israel has abated, God will comfort them.

God will comfort and save them with joy and promises fulfilled:

God's judgment will not preclude God's mercy and compassion.

God's love will win the day; God's favor is unswaying.

Sing, the prophet says: Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously.

Sing to let this be known to all the earth.

Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,

for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

Sing... to let the world know that in the face of fear, God is our salvation.

Sing to remind yourselves that God is your strength and your might.

We could just say these words, but they do not carry

the same unitive power if we just say them.

As Oscar Hammerstein once wrote:

"A bell's not a bell 'til you ring it; a song's not a song 'til you sing it.

Love in your heart wasn't put there to stay—

Love isn't love 'til you give it away." (Oscar Hammerstein, *The Sound of Music*)

It's all about the song, and it's all about the people of God who are spiritually formed and spiritually united in the singing.

And it's all about God who listens, hears, and responds to our prayerful songs.

My daughter's flute choir in Charlotte traveled to a nursing home recently

where most of the residents were mentally or physically differently abled to perform some Christmas music for them.

She said that at the end of their program, they play familiar hymns and invite the audience to sing along with them.

And she said one little lady kept throwing her arms up in the air during the hymns in a victory sign, and yelling, "Yea!"

This woman couldn't remember the words of the hymns, but she recognized them as her songs of victory, and she wanted to be part of the choir that was singing them, claiming them, proclaiming them, enjoying them, and being saved from fear by them.

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death... (Ps. 23)*

*Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning... (O Come, All Ye Faithful)*

*My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord... (Ps. 84)*

*Yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I take my refuge... (Ps. 57)*

*Yea, amen, let all adore thee... (Lo, He Comes with Clouds Descending)*

*Yea, with choirs of angels and with all the faithful of ever time and place, who forever sing to the glory of your name... (Great Thanksgiving)*

It takes a choir—and today, all of us are the primary choir  
called to sing praises to the Lord,  
to shout aloud and sing for joy, yea!  
because even in the face of violence and upheaval, fear and uncertainty,  
God is preparing us for the coming of the Messiah,  
the Holy One of Israel, who will be  
the living water of our salvation. Amen!

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