
HOPE HEADLINES

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Losing It

Lent begins this year on February 17, with Ash Wednesday. This approaching season of the church year affords us an opportunity to consider several popular ideas on how to get the most out of life.

Idea #1: *Indulging yourself.* According to this idea, getting the most out of life is accomplished by getting all you can of all you want. Gratification is the driving force in this view. Gratification is also the goal in and of itself. Moreover, the cultural dynamics of consumerism and creative advertising figure out lots of ways to make sure any satisfaction we feel won't last. That way self-indulgence persists and serves market gain. The foundation of this idea is that gratifying the self gives life meaning.

Idea #2: *Applying yourself.* According to this idea, getting the most out of life is accomplished by learning skills, working hard, and producing tangible results. Unlike idea #1, in this case the self may be applied unselfishly to serve a larger purpose. One's personal sense of worth is connected to doing and productivity.

Idea #3: *Finding yourself.* According to this idea, what we need to get the most out of life is an intentional program of self-discovery. Unlike idea #2, which finds the personal sense of worth in *doing*, idea #3 finds it "underneath" *doing* at the level of *being*. Unlike idea #1, idea #3 may include facing and changing hard truths revealed in the journey of self-discovery. One makes these hard changes to align with the discovered self which is understood as a "truer" version of the self.

At first glance, this pathway of how to get the most out of life sounds quite congruent with the Christian journey.

What **Ideas 1, 2, and 3** all have in common is the centrality of the self.

This brings us to **Idea #4**. This one is offered by Jesus. We can observe it in two stark and blunt passages:

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake and the sake of the Gospel, will save it (Mark 8:34-35).

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains just a single grain. But if it dies, it bears much fruit (John 12:24).

According to Jesus, getting the most out of life is not accomplished by *indulging*, *applying*, or even *finding* the self, but rather, by *losing* the self. The early Anabaptists appropriated this idea of Jesus in part through their concept of *Gelassenheit* "yieldedness."

This Lenten season is an opportunity for all of us to reflect on and act on what getting the most out of life by **losing it** looks like in practice.

~~ Pastor Dave



Ash Wednesday, February 17, marks the official start of the 40-day Lenten season and is hallmarked by the placing of ashes on the foreheads of parishioners while saying the ancient words from Scripture, "You are dust and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19). Traditionally made by the burning of the palm leaves from the previous Palm Sunday, the ashes symbolize our mortality as well as our sorrow over our sins. The practice harkens back to

Old Testament days when God's people wore sackcloth and ashes to visually show to God and those around them the depth of their repentance for their wayward behavior. The prophet Jeremiah called for repentance by saying: "O daughter of my people, gird on sackcloth, roll in the ashes" (Jer 6:26). Today wearing ashes on our heads in the shape of a cross becomes a reminder to us and a witness to others who see us wearing these ashen crosses that we firmly believe that though we will one day die, we know we will one day be made alive again forevermore, forgiven and free through the precious cross of Christ.

Hope will offer a come-and-go Ash Wednesday service on February 17, 5:30-7:30 pm. You are invited to a time of self-reflection with readings, prayers and the imposition of ashes (these will be placed in individual communion cups for each person to self-impose).

The Worship Commission will offer free Lent devotionals, "Steadfast Love" by Henri J.M. Nouwen. Please sign up for your copy by February 4.

HOSTING 2021

In this new Covid reality of hosting, the 2021 year will look a tiny bit different. Hope has chosen our 3 in person hosting dates and we have also chosen two weeks to be "additional support" to another church in case they need more assistance. Each hosting congregation has stepped up in this way to assist. Each 'in person' hosting congregation will always have 3 support churches to lean on when needed.

FEBRUARY 14 - 21 We are "additional support" only for Tyler Road Baptist Church and True Life Church

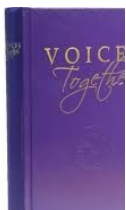
APRIL 25 - MAY 2 - We host in person

JULY 25 - AUGUST 1 - We host in person

SEPTEMBER 19 - 26 - We are "additional support" only for GracePoint and Westwood Presbyterian Church

OCTOBER 31 - NOVEMBER 7 - We host in person.

Our Family Promise coordinating team is Amy Bellar, Val Mayta and Michelle Ernt.



VOICES TOGETHER OUR NEW HYMNAL

Our church copies have arrived...120 pew editions; 3 large print copies; 7 accompaniment books; 4 worship leader books.

HOW IS VOICES TOGETHER ORGANIZED?

Hymnals are typically organized in one of three ways. They are developed around the *Christian year* (for example, Advent, Christmas, Good Friday, Easter), around *theological concepts* (such as God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, church), or around *acts of worship* (for example, gathering, praising, praying). Many hymnals draw on aspects of all three.

The 1992 *Hymnal: A Worship Book* is mostly organized by acts of worship. The focus on what songs

are doing rather than what they are about was a significant innovation. *Voices Together* builds on the acts of worship structure started in *Hymnal: A Worship Book* while developing the model a step further. The collection begins with gathering and concludes with sending—and everything is held within this order of worship. The overall structure looks like this:

- Gathering with praise and reconciling ourselves to God and one another
- Telling God's story through Scripture
- Responding to God's story by confessing faith, celebrating baptism and communion, sharing our stories, and turning to God in prayer
- Being sent out to share our gifts, living God's story in witness and service with God's blessing

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE THEOLOGY OF VOICES TOGETHER?

A lot of listening has gone into creating *Voices Together*. Through focus groups, "heart song" surveys, four samplers, and countless events, the committee has gathered much insight. *Voices Together* emerges out of this careful listening. It's our sincere prayer that *Voices Together* reflects who we are theologically and how we have opened ourselves to movements of the Spirit. We also turn to the [Mennonite World Conference Shared Convictions](#) and the [Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective](#) as points of reference.

Does that mean people will see their personal theology mirrored back on every page? Likely not, as that is not the intent of a hymnal. Rather than a book for personal piety, a denominational hymnal represents the theological breadth of the church. In *Voices Together*, we seek to represent the theological breadth of Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada.

We want *Voices Together* to connect us with Christians around the world and in our neighborhoods—even those with whom we may disagree theologically. While your congregation might choose not to sing a song for theological reasons, others might find that piece central to faithfully following Jesus.

Voices Together has 992 pages—more than any of our previous hymnals. It features 760 songs and 309 worship resources. As we made space for abundant material, we realize that in many parts of the Mennonite church we worship less frequently than in generations past. Thirty years ago, many Mennonite congregations had Sunday evening worship and midweek services, in addition to Sunday morning services. Today, many consider attending services twice a month to be regular

participation. Consider a church that meets weekly and sings five different songs each week. That congregation, for example, sings 260 songs in a year.

It's been said that a congregation's musical core contains roughly 200 songs—and the 200 songs in one congregation are likely not the same as in another. For example, in some congregations, hymns form the core, while in others contemporary worship songs are core. We anticipate that congregations will find ample material compatible with their core—as well as plenty of new material to explore and share.

HOW WERE SONGS SCREENED FOR CONSIDERATION?

Congregations and individuals submitted hundreds of “heart songs” for the committee's consideration. In addition, writers, artists, songwriters, and composers submitted thousands of pieces of original material. Beyond this, the committee surveyed dozens of hymnals, collections of worship resources, and single-author or single-composer collections.

On January 1, 2017, the Mennonite Worship and Song Committee launched a web portal to receive new and original works of art, worship resources, tunes, texts, and songs. When the submissions period closed on January 1, 2018, we had received some 2,200 submissions.

The committee's process included preliminary screening, reviews by small teams, and committee discussion and discernment. As they reviewed items for consideration, the committee kept an eye toward achieving a balanced collection with the following:

- Familiar heart songs alongside new worship resources and songs
- Music in many languages and from traditions around the world
- Songs that use a breadth of images for God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit
- Songs that describe our personal relationship with God and that connect us to our community as the body of Christ, and the work of the Spirit in mission to the world

This infographic relays some of the structure and sequence of committee process.

WHAT ARE SOME NEW FEATURES NOT FOUND IN PREVIOUS MENNONITE HYMNALS?

1. *Voices Together* is the first worship and song collection to contain [visual art](#). Twelve pieces of visual art were chosen for inclusion. These 12 pieces of visual

art appear throughout *Voices Together*, inviting worshipers to encounter God in ways that engage sight as well as sound.

2. *Voices Together* engages the many technology changes that have happened in recent years. The *Voices Together* app (available through the [GIA Hymnals App](#) platform) and projection edition each offer congregations and individuals new and exciting ways to access music and to participate in worship.

3. *Voices Together* features chord symbols for a majority of songs to resource congregations where guitarists or keyboardists rely on this type of notation.

4. *Voices Together* presents more contemporary worship music and expands our musical vocabulary across many spectrums, in response to wide-ranging expressions of worship in Mennonite congregations.

5. *Voices Together* has more work by Mennonite writers, artists, composers, and songwriters than any previous collection.

6. *Voices Together* features many supports for worship planners, leaders, and pastors. The new worship leader edition is a simple, accessible volume filled with theological grounding, practical suggestions, and words for worship. It includes quick introductions to topics like the Christian year and the use of technology in worship, along with easy-to-use suggestions for preparing prayers. It includes worship resources for the practices central to our faith and life—including baptisms, communion, child blessings, and funerals.

WHAT PORTION OF SONGS ARE IN FOUR-PART HARMONY? WHAT PORTION ARE IN UNISON?

Of the 760 songs, 58% are four-part. An additional 11% feature some vocal harmonies and 31% are fully unison.

More FAQ can be found at voicestogether.net



Sanctuary Prep

February 7-Connie
February 14-Lori M.
February 21-Ruthie
February 28-Cynthia

Scripture Reader

February 7-Brad
February 14-Joanna
February 21-Mike V
February 28-Joan

Pianist

February 7-Vicki
February 14-Amy

Worship Leader

February 7-Marcus
February 14-Connie
February 21-Connie
February 28-TBA

February 21-Cynthia
February 28-Laurie



Reader's Theatre adapted from "The Meeting Place" by John Paul Lederach (We are sharing this piece from worship on January 24)

Narrator: Recently, I was greatly distressed due to a nasty conflict, I kept hearing the names of Truth, Mercy, Justice and Peace invoked time and again. I asked the people in this awful fight, "What if we invited our four friends to join us and asked them to openly discuss their views about conflict?" Nobody objected, so **Truth, Mercy, Justice and Peace** came into the room and sat them down in front of the contentious crowd. I addressed the four. "We want to know what concerns you each have in the midst of conflict. Would it be possible to hear your views?"

TRUTH "I am Truth, at times of conflict I am concerned with bringing forward, out into the open, what really happened. Not with the watered-down version. Not with a partial recounting. My handmaidens are transparency, honesty, and clarity.

Narrator "Truth," (*I interject hesitantly, not wanting to question her integrity.*) "You know I have been around a lot of conflict in my life and there is one thing that I am always curious about. When I talk to one side, (*point to one side of the congregation*) like these people over here, they say that you are with them. When I talk to the others, (*point to other side of the congregation*) like our friends over there, they claim you are on their side. Yet in the middle of all this pain, you seem to come and go. Is there only one Truth?"

TRUTH: "There is only one Truth, but I can be experienced in many different ways. I reside within each person yet nobody owns me."

Narrator: "If discovering you is so crucial, why are you so hard to find?" Truth thought for a while, then said,

TRUTH: "I can only appear where the search is genuine and authentic. I come forward only when each person shares with others what they know of me and each respects the others voice.

Narrator: "Of these three friends, Mercy, Justice and Peace, whom do you fear the most?"

TRUTH: Without hesitation **Truth** pointed to Mercy.) "I fear him, in his haste to heal he covers my light and clouds my clarity. He forgets, that forgiveness is *our* child, not his."

Narrator: "I am sure you have things to say. What concerns you?"

MERCY: "I am Mercy." (*Say in a pleading voice, as though you know that you, among them all, are under tight scrutiny.*) I am concerned with people and their relationships. Acceptance, compassion and support stand with me. I know the frailty of the human condition. Who among them is perfect?" Truth knows that her light can bring clarity but too often it blinds and burns. What freedom is there without life and relationship?"

Narrator: "Mercy, whom do you fear most?"

MERCY: (*turn and face Justice, say in a clear voice*) "Justice. In his haste to change and make things right, he forgets that his roots lie in real people and relationships."

Narrator: "So Justice," I said, "what do you have to say?"

JUSTICE: (*Stand up and say in a strong voice, accompanied by a deep smile*) "I am Justice, and Mercy is correct, I am concerned about making things right. I consider myself a person who looks beyond the surface and the issues about which people seem to fight. What lies at the root of most conflicts are inequality, greed, and wrongdoing. I am most concerned about accountability. Too often we think that any and everything is acceptable. Love without accountability is nothing but words. Love with accountability is changed behavior and action. This is the real meaning of restoration.

Narrator: Justice whom do you fear?"

JUSTICE:*(chuckle as with the irony of years of experience)* I fear that my children, Mercy and Peace, see themselves as parents," *(say with a hint of gentle provocation)*, "when, in fact, they are the fruit of my labor."

Narrator: Peace burst into an irrepressible smile and before I could speak she stepped forward.

PEACE: "I am Peace, and I agree with all three, I am the child to whom they give birth, the mother who labors to give them life, and the spouse who accompanies them on the way. I hold the community together, with the encouragement of security, respect and well-being."

TRUTH: *(say in a frustrated voice)* "I am Truth, and that is precisely the problem. You see yourself as greater and bigger than the rest."

JUSTICE *(point your finger toward Peace)* "Exactly, I am Justice and I see this as arrogance, you do not place yourself where you belong. You follow us. You do not precede us."

PEACE: "This is true Truth and Brother, I am more fully expressed through and after you both. But it is also true that without me there is no space for Truth to be heard," *(turn toward Justice)*. "And without me there is no respite from the vicious cycle of accusation, bitterness, and bloodshed."

Narrator *(pause for a moment)* "Peace, and whom do you fear?"

PEACE: "Not who, but what and when, I fear manipulation. I fear the manipulation of people who use Truth for their purposes. Some ignore her, some use her as a whip, some claim to own her. I fear the times when for the sake of Mercy, Justice is sacrificed. I fear the blind manipulation that for the ideal of Justice some will sacrifice life itself. When manipulation such as these take place, I am violated and rendered a meaningless empty."

Narrator: *(address all four)* "How would it ever be possible for you to meet together? What would you need from each other?"

TRUTH: *(look first at Mercy)* "Mercy, you must slow down. Give space for Truth to emerge."

MERCY:*(nod and say to Truth)* Truth, shine bright, but please take care not to blind and burn. As Mercy, I remind you to remember that each person is a child of God, that each is weak and needs support to grow."

JUSTICE: "I have been partially reassured by the words of Peace. As Justice, I need a clear statement that Peace gives a place for accountability and action. Remember when Micah spoke of us. Love Mercy and do Justice he wrote. Peace must give place for Justice to come forward or truly you will not be fully born."

PEACE: "Justice, our lips will meet if we recognize that we need one another. As Peace, I desire that you let not your heart of compassion fall into a bitterness that rages without purpose, and I will provide the soil for you to work and bear fruit."

Narrator: I ask, "And what, is this place called where you now stand together?"

TRUTH: This is where truth and mercy meet.

JUSTICE: Where justice and peace embrace.

PEACE: This is where Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven.

MERCY: This place is reconciliation.