

I am going to begin with a somewhat odd but in fact very personal confession: I am a Vulcan.

I am not referring to the Roman God of fire and his followers, I am referring to Mr. Spock and all who are wired like him.

If you are a trekkie, and even if you aren't, the term *Vulcan* has entered our cultural vernacular as a term to refer to someone who seems preternaturally calm and collected. The *Vulgans* are the ones among us who can be counted upon to remain calm when all hell is breaking loose. *Vulgans* approach the world through logic.

I have absolutely no idea if that's how you see me or not, but it's how I see myself. But that's not why I refer to myself as *Vulcan*.

I choose the term because of a rare moment when Mr. Spock admits that the source of the unflappable calm of his kinfolk is actually a deep awareness that they are in fact, highly emotional beings who run the risk of being completely ruled by their emotions. Only a highly rational, logic driven approach to life can be counted upon to keep the tyranny of emotions at bay.

This is not to say that I am an emotional time-bomb waiting to dissolve into anger or sadness, but to say that I recognize that once that door gets opened, it's hard for me to close it. And there are certain triggers that will do it.

I suspect that we are all wired to a certain extent that way... whether we tightly control our emotions or not, there are certain thoughts, sounds, smells that will trigger for us an emotional response.

I had two seminary professors who would weep copiously at the mention of grace.

That's not my trigger, I can speak at length about grace and explain and opine about the theology that surrounds grace. I can preach about it with nary a sniffle.

But singing about it? Well, now that's a different story.

Walter and I consult about all of the hymns and he now well knows that there are certain ones that I prefer not to sing when I have to be sentient afterwards.

And here's the thing. I don't mind sharing this with you because I know that many of you have the exact same triggers that I do. I know this because I can see you when we're worshipping.

Yes, that's right. I know when you are sleeping, I know when you are awake. I know if you've been good or bad...

Okay. That's taking it too far. But I do know that there are hymns that move many of you to your very core. I've seen it. I know it is true of me.

I've wondered sometimes how that comes to be the case. I listen to music in my car, sometimes singing along, and it just doesn't evoke the same response.

But the hymns we sing together... I know it and you know it, they move us.

And as I think of it, as I ponder what gives the hymns their power, I come again and again to the concept of *story*.

The hymns have a stories. It's the stories that give them their power.

What do I mean?

I mean I can't sing *Jesus Loves Me*. I really can't. I could until it was played at the funeral of a child who had died by his own hand.

The power of the hymn, the message that it had to preach to the singing, worshipping, mourning congregation resonates with me to this day.

I know this is true of you all because I know which hymns cause you to close the hymnals on the last verses and keep on singing.

The stories have power because the stories connect us to the body of faith.

The stories of the hymns, the stories they tell, the stories they connect us to also connect us to God.

I selected as the lesson for the day the twenty-fourth psalm because of the one line, “the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” (KJV)

These stories I’m speaking of, the stories of the hymns, the stories of our lives as we encounter these hymns, are all taking place within the larger story of God’s love for us.

“The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof...”

Everything we sing, we sing under God’s watchful eye. Wherever our stories lead us, they lead us under God’s watchful eye.

That’s what gives the story its meaning – the grace that is infused throughout it all.

Which brings me back to these hymns that we’re singing... when you think of them in light of God’s care for all of the earth, for all the fullness thereof, they aren’t just songs.

They aren’t even religious songs. They are our sung prayers to God.

Which, incidentally is why it doesn’t matter whether you have any musical aptitude whatsoever when it comes to singing hymns. There is no need to refrain from singing in order to avoid offending your neighbor’s ear – you’re not singing to your neighbor!

The hymns we sing come out of their own story; they become part of our story, all of which is within God’s love story of creation.

Walter lent me a wonderful book this past week about the stories of the hymns. I was looking up all of my favorites trying to find a compelling story to share with you to

illustrate this. It happens that I'm such a traditionalist that my favorite hymns have pretty boring stories. I love *Old Hundredth*, and it's hard to make something compelling out of the fact that John Calvin only wanted his congregation to sing the psalms so he hired a Frenchman, Louis Bourgeois, to write a tune for it. It's just not the same as the hymns where someone's whole family dies at sea (It is Well with my Soul) or when a talented but sickly man, Isaac Watts, spent 36 years living with family friends writing hymns. But it doesn't need to be, because the power comes from how it tells us the story and we use it to tell the story of God's love to others.

It reminds me of a sermon illustration I heard many years back about a prominent judge and devout Christian. It seemed that when he died, his church was too small to hold the expected crowd and so they moved the service to the great big cathedral church down the street so that all the city's elite could be present. He had a great love for Fannie Crosby hymns and so that was what they sang at his funeral. But only a handful of folks in the great church knew the hymns, the members of his church, and they sang them with gusto. And his pastor later said, "I realized as we sang those hymns in that church that we were the ones who knew the story and we were singing it to those who needed it.

The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof. Let's fill it with song. Let's fill it with hymns. Let's sing the story.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.