

Service for January 8, 2017

HYMN: "Turn, Turn, Turn"

READING: "Come Healing," by Leonard Cohen

O, gather up the brokenness
Bring it to me now
The fragrance of those promises
You never dared to vow

The splinters that you carried
The cross you left behind
Come healing of the body
Come healing of the mind

And let the heavens hear it
The penitential hymn
Come healing of the spirit
Come healing of the limb

Behold the gates of mercy
In arbitrary space
And none of us deserving
Of cruelty or the grace

O, solitude of longing
Where love has been confined
Come healing of the body
Come healing of the mind

O, see the darkness yielding

That tore the light apart
Come healing of the reason

Come healing of the heart

O, troubledness concealing
An undivided love
The heart beneath is teaching
To the broken heart above

And let the heavens falter

Let the earth proclaim
Come healing of the altar
Come healing of the name

O, longing of the branches
To lift the little bud
O, longing of the arteries
To purify the blood

And let the heavens hear it
The penitential hymn
Come healing of the spirit
Come healing of the limb

O let the heavens hear it
The penitential hymn
Come healing of the spirit
Come healing of the limb

HYMN: "Lean on Me"

JOYS & CONCERNS

INTERLUDE: "Mr. Tambourine Man"

PRAYER: At Poplar Ridge Meeting, our worship is a combination of the three elements of words, music, and silence. The ratios might vary from week to week, but I wouldn't want to give up any of them. Whenever I think about which might be the most important, I can't choose. They seem equally valuable.

This is the point in our service when we usually have a prayer. Today, let us make the prayer a silent one, each person praying in his or her own way.

HYMN: "Let It Be"

MESSAGE FOR MEETING, JANUARY 8, 2017

There's a line in the song that Jeff played for the prelude, John Lennon's "Imagine": "Imagine no religion." Well, in my message to follow, you won't have to imagine it. There's nothing overtly religious in it, though it does contain one mention of God, and another of heaven. We are the Religious Society of

Friends, so I hope no one will be unsatisfied or dissatisfied if I give a different sort of message today. It will be personal, but I hope not *too* eccentric, or self-indulgent. If there is a lack of religion, it will at least be timely for Black History Month. And I hope it will be a positive message for the beginning of the new year.

What I have for you is a poem, of a kind that I've been writing in the past couple years—longish poems, three or four pages, on the subject of music. And not music in the broad sense, but specific music, certain musicians, particular songs, woven together with personal reminiscence, not to mention personal taste, which is the only credential I have as a music critic.

You've probably noticed in service so far, that I've been drawing on a certain period of music. Music of the Sixties, and musicians who emerged at that time, some who kept going, others who, for one reason or another, didn't. People of my generation have been feeling nostalgic about the music of our youth lately, I think—and maybe not just lately. A lot of retrospectives, revivals, looking back. Maybe it's because there was something especially great about the music of the Sixties. Or maybe it's because we're getting old. In either case, doesn't it seem to be true that the human psyche is open in a peculiar way when we are young, and things enter then with special force and lastingness. They seem... immortal, at least as long as we live. What I am offering you today is something from my memory/soul, musical and otherwise. Hopefully it doesn't represent a form of

arrested development, but the music I listened to when I was young stays with me as vividly as ever, and still moves me. If you are younger than I am, or older, or if you were just paying attention to other things, you might not get all the references. But I hope that won't matter too much, and I think you will get the drift. It may seem a little idolatrous, and maybe it is, but I think it is basically gratitude that the poem expresses. A song can be a form of prayer, or a sort of shrine. What is worshipped there? The human heart, and the gift of art.

Read "Otis Redding."

OTIS REDDING

Wilson Pickett. Solomon Burke. Percy Sledge.
Sam and Dave. I was a fan
of all of them. And in
a slightly different wing, Levi Stubbs,
of The Four Tops, and David Ruffin,
of The Temptations, and in the silky
higher range, Smokey Robinson.
A little earlier, Sam Cooke, Jackie Wilson,
Fats Domino, Little Richard.
Not to mention James Brown,
a musical universe unto himself.
I've already written a poem about him.
Not to mention Ray Charles....

Soul Music—male division, 1960s.
It's a pleasure just to call their names.
I'm not sure about all that's happened since then.
Something happened
that caused me to lose touch.
But there's this period of a decade or so,
from which I can identify dozens of songs
from hearing just a few seconds,
sometimes it seems I can do it
from a single note.
I was in high school, then college.
For whatever reasons, my young soul

was wide open to that music. I drank it in.
And now, when I'm getting awfully close
to the other end, to the end,
when I hear those songs,
I feel a strange happiness.

And then there was
Otis
Redding.
When I started buying his records, with "Otis Blue,"
he already had two albums,
so I went out and got them too.
And I spent many hours listening
to that rough sweet voice.
"That's How Strong My Love Is."
I heard the Rolling Stones' version first.
and I liked it fine, more than fine,
when Mick Jagger sang it,
I wouldn't take anything away from him.
I guess there was an element
of theft in it, young white guys
having hits with black music,
but also praise, and there were benefits
both ways across the Atlantic.
It was quite a musical time.

Love songs.
"I've Been Loving You Too Long."
What did I know about love? Nothing,
except for longing, mostly physical.
I'd had one girlfriend. I was eighteen.
But that didn't stop me
from feeling those songs,
or from listening to them over and over
in my teen-age rooms
on the mono record player
I carried with me like a small suitcase
with my soul inside
from place to place.

The spare, sharp guitar notes
of Steve Cropper.
The organ of Booker T.
Duck Dunn's bass. Al Jackson's drums.
(No finer example of positive interaction
between whites and blacks,

of excellent, tight collaboration,
to be found in American history
that Booker T. and the MGs.)
The crisp and moaning horns.
The crisp and moaning horns.
Perfect accompaniment for Otis's voice,
with a texture as rough as the bark
of a wild cherry tree. Rough,
but sweet as dark cherries.

Janis Joplin was a big fan.
"Otis is God," she would say.
She was very likely high
on something beside music
when she said it,
but I do know what she meant.

His fast songs were just as good as the ballads.
Aretha Franklin's "Respect"
is a wonderful thing, a masterpiece for sure.
But it was Otis who wrote it,
and his version is also wonderful,
driving along to the snare drum of joy.

And "Try a Little Tenderness," both slow and fast,
beginning in the pure syllables
of tenderness,
"Oh, she may be weary,
Young girls they do get weary,
Wearing that same old shaggy dress..."
then building to the full throttle
of Otis's ecstatic "Got-ta got-ta got-tas."
If you want a song to go to heaven to,
to lift you up gradually
and then carry you away,
that would be a good choice.

But, in a different sort of mood,
another good choice would be
the song he's probably most famous for—
"(Sitting on) The Dock of the Bay."
It's unique. He was trying something new.
Otis's big, rich voice, so quiet among
a simplicity of guitar, bass, and drums,
and delicate horns coming in.
And the little bit of whistling he does at the end.

Even the sound of waves, and the cry of gulls,
all work so well.

The gulls were Otis's idea,
but he never got to hear the finished version
with their cries.
Steve Cropper added those.
Three days after the song was recorded, Otis was gone.
Plane crash in foggy winter lake.
He was twenty-six.

Which would you choose,
our songs of excitement and joy,
or our songs of sadness and loneliness?
No need to choose.
“(Sitting on) The Dock of the Bay”
is a short song. Simple lyrics.
“Looks like nothing's gonna change,
Everything still remains the same.”
Whenever I hear it, I can't believe how beautiful it is,
so sad, so calm. That song rocks
like a boat,
and Otis's voice rows us home.

Now, I would like to send you into the silence with that last song I talked about.

Play “Dock on the Bay.”

SILENCE

FINAL SONG/BENEDICTION: Usually we have a final hymn and a few closing words at this point. Today I would like to combine the two, and do that with another song by Otis Redding. Feel free to hum or sing along, as you feel led, and as Otis, at a certain point in the song, will invite you to do.

Play “Amen.”

One final note: This being 2017, it is now the 50th anniversary year of Otis Redding's death. Time flies. I hope you have gotten something good from these thoughts and this music. Thanks to Jeff for his playing as always, and especially for his collaboration today. All the music was of my choosing, and he did some extra preparation at my request so we could have this year's Nobel Prize winner in Literature included in the service in the interlude.

Are there any afterthoughts, introductions, or announcements?