

“Can Pastor Rob Sing?”

July 25, 2021

Isaiah 43:18,19

St. Matthew 10:40-42

Can Pastor Rob sing? Might seem a strange title for a sermon, + it's a question I might be able to answer next Sunday, but not today. What I hope to share are some ways we might cause him to want to sing. Todd Agnew's arrangement of "Amazing Grace," sung so artfully by Mike Popplewell, is the concluding one that Scott Stevenson, our Director of Music Ministries, invites us to re-hymn-agine. We especially want to thank our guest musicians, Tom Leddy and Scott Tipping, who accompanied Scott and Mike.

Why has "AG" continued to be a favorite for centuries? Could it be because it has a way of getting into our bones, reminding us of what God has done and is doing in us in even our toughest times? Could it be that occasion when we and others needed to sing it?

Before this week I knew just a little about its original composer, Captain and later Rev. John Newton. Captain Newton's ships transported Africans captured for slavery in the American colonies. During a sea storm he called on our Lord, became a Christian, but still, staying for years in the slave trade. He found it hard to give up a lucrative career, AND was financially invested in the slave trade. He even kept those investments after he had studied scripture and become a clergyman. Our amazing God of amazing grace continued to work in his life until he was ready to divest of all benefit from the slave trade and become a writer of pamphlets telling of the horrors of the slave ships. He became a friend of William Wilberforce who led the fight against the slave trade in Britain and lived to see the end of Britain's involvement, dying just months after it was outlawed by Parliament. His story fills out the phrase, "God isn't finished with me yet." God isn't finished with us, yet, hence, Pastor Rob and his

family are on the way. Jesus says this ~ when someone welcomes you, they are welcoming me. As we welcome not just the Hamilton's, but all who enter here, we can remember these remarkable words. **ST MATTHEW 10:40**

Daisy Swanson, a wise elder in the Earlville church more than once said, "It takes a good congregation to make a good pastor." So true! Ours IS one of those good congregations, spectacular, really, made up of strong, bright, caring people committed to Christ Jesus. Today, seven days away from Pastor Rob's start with us, I'd like to let you in on some secrets that can make Pastor Rob's ministry with us a joy for him and for us, and a success for us all, maybe make him sing.

It was a late afternoon in my first fall of my first appointment. A first year fourth grade teacher had begun attending our church and wanted a word with me. As we sat down I could see she was holding back tears. In a few minutes she began to cry. Something had happened, harsh words from a parent, trouble with a student? Someone had gotten to the core, hurt her feelings, challenged her ability to teach and to lead. First year teachers and even beyond can have tender hearts. As I listened I realized I was still thinking of teachers like I did when I was in fourth grade. They seemed so put together. I hadn't given much thought to them having feelings. Teachers do, as do pastors. There are times when we must share a concern, perhaps passionate thoughts on a matter. Pastors appreciate and welcome honest feedback. We can keep in mind that some ways of speaking build bridges. Some build walls. My mother put it this way, "count to 10 before you speak, and then another 10 if necessary." St. Paul puts it this way ~ **Colossians 4.6**. Thinking of how we speak to our pastors takes me to how we speak about them.

Some of you remember Rev. Carl Mettling and his gracious wife, Fran. On a visit with beloved members who have fond memories of them we shared stories. Theirs were from the Mettling's time here as pastor and spouse. I knew

Pastor Carl and his wife Fran when I was a student @ G-ETS. The Mettling's went out of their way to create gatherings to welcome us to G-ETS and the wider NIC. Great memories we shared, and that was a good place to share them. I don't think I ever told that to Pastor Rich and Donna, and I won't likely share that with Pastor Rob unless he asks.

One of the gifts we can share with Pastor Rob is silence . . . when it comes to our favorite former pastors. As time passes what they did well becomes magnified while their mistakes fade to invisibility. Pastor Rob knows we have fond memories of former pastors. We're that kind of congregation! He may seek you out, asking questions about how they did this, or what they thought about that. The place for us to share our stories of the pastors we love and how we miss them is with each other.

When families get together we share memories. Congregations are no exception. We like to remember when the sanctuary was packed, we had three times we could worship on Sunday mornings, Saturday evenings, too. Our glory days ~ These days many spend their Sundays doing other things and are not connected or serving the missions and ministries we hold dear. It concerns and saddens us. Into this mix of emotions the prophet Isaiah brings a word from our Lord ~ **(Isaiah 43:18.19)** It's as though God is revealing that when we get caught up in conversations about our glory days we are in danger of missing the new thing springing forth. That's why Pastor Rob and his family are coming to us. When he springs forth into action next Sunday seems to me Isaiah is saying look forward, not back.

Many have arranged "Amazing Grace" over the years. When Todd Agnew adapted "AG" to a tune he composed, he revealed grace to be like rain, a gentle rain refreshing and restoring us. How can our words and welcome be grace like rain for Pastor Rob and his family? What about the tough times that are bound to come? God can and will use those tough times. They, too, can be

like gentle rain, nourishing Pastor Rob, nourishing us on our journey to the new things God is doing.

Pastor Rob and I met in person for the first time last Tuesday. He has broad, strong shoulders. Next Sunday, August 1, he is going to lift us up onto those shoulders. Sure he will take breaks but at all times when you pray for him remember he holds 24/7 in his heart our church and our future. As Jesus hints, we are welcoming a prophet. We are welcoming a righteous man. We welcome with things as simple as a cup of cold water, our gentle grace like rain.

Can Pastor Rob sing? As the old hymn says, I sing because I'm happy. I sing because I'm free. Your grace will bring a smile to Pastor Rob's face. Your amazing grace will put a song in his heart. It takes a good congregation to make a good pastor. That's us, that's Pastor Rob, that's us together. God is definitely NOT finished with us yet!

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