

Who Begat Music?

Genesis 4:16-26

Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and named it Enoch after his son Enoch. To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael the father of Methushael, and Methushael the father of Lamech. Lamech took two wives; the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. Adah bore Jabal; he was the ancestor of those who live in tents and have livestock. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the ancestor of all those who play the lyre and pipe. Zillah bore Tubal-cain, who made all kinds of bronze and iron tools. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

No one ever preaches from 'the begats.' I mean, let's face it, no one really reads 'the begats.' It's a lot of names we can't pronounce and places we've never heard of. Unless you're some mega-historian, trying to create a Biblical family tree, who cares?

I will be honest with you. In my own personal Bible reading, I too will sometimes skip right over the begats. But sometimes, you can find some good stuff in there. Like in our reading this morning. We discover that Jabal was the ancestor of those who live in tents and have livestock. Jubal was the ancestor of all who play the lyre and pipe. Tubal-cain made bronze and iron tools. Again, what's the big deal? So we know what their profession was. Who cares?

Well, this is actually more than that. This is the story of three brothers: one was a farmer, one was a toolmaker, one a musician. And for the early Israelites, these were critical roles. Farmers and toolmakers made life possible. Musicians made life beautiful. By calling these brothers 'the ancestor of those who...', the writer is calling them the founder of these activities. Much like Hippocrates is the father of modern medicine and Herodotus is the father of historians. According to the Israelites, Jubal is father of musicians. But to be honest with you, I don't think we should read this part of the Bible as a literal recording of historical events. I don't think any single person was probably the first person to make music. It's more likely that Jubal was the first Israelite to really master the lyre and the pipe. Kind of like how we think of Stradivarius as the master violin maker, though we know they were made by other people long before he came along.

Trying to figure out exactly when and how music started is kind of like asking “who invented swimming?” or “who was the first person to cook their food?” The truth is, we don’t really know, we can’t figure it out, and that’s not really important anyway. Music is important, however, because it does play a critical role in helping us to connect with God.

- Miriam sings a song of rejoicing to God when the Israelites first cross the Red Sea, claiming freedom from Egypt.
- The ark of the covenant was brought into the temple with singing, dancing, and instruments. In fact, the temple had a whole troop of musicians for creating worship.
- Paul and Silas, when wrongfully imprisoned, made their time bearable by singing hymns of praise.

The Book of Psalms is a hymn book, expressing our beliefs about God and our lifting our prayers to God. For most of us, when we stop to think about the psalms, we think about our favorites. We think about the most well-known ones. We think of flowery language and great images, like:

- The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.
- Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.
- Lord, you have searched me and known me.

But the psalms also include a lot of other really forceful language. We find the words of sorrow and grieving. Distress and fear. Anger and even rage. Consider these psalms:

- I am weary with moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears.
- Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me.
- O that you would kill the wicked, O God...

I’m not going to ask you to raise your hands this morning, but I’m guessing that every one of you has had a time when you felt like that. When you were absorbed by those emotions that our culture tells us are bad. Society tells us to be happy, or to keep it to ourselves. Not to show too much sorrow, fear, anger... But we all feel those things. So what are we supposed to do with those emotions?

One of the ways people safely express those emotions is through music. The songs we love the most are those that we can identify with. The songs that help us to sort through our own feelings. The ones that can give words to what we're already feeling. Songs can speak for us when we don't know what to say.

And so can the Holy Spirit. In Romans, Paul reminds us that though "we do not know how to pray as we ought, [the] Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words." Singing and prayer can accomplish the same thing! Now don't get me wrong. Not all songs are going to help us connect with God.

But sometimes we connect with God by praying, trusting that the Spirit will make our true feelings known, even in our imperfect words. And sometimes we connect with God by singing, trusting that the Spirit will make our true feelings known, even through the words of someone else. It's really no coincidence that the longest book in the Bible, by far, is the book of Psalms – a book comprised entirely of hymns and songs.

Our Scripture reading this morning says Lamech begat Jubal, and Jubal begat music. And that may be true. But the deeper truth is this: God begat music. God created us to resonate with music, because it does help us to connect with him. We worship a god who chooses and longs to be in relationship with the people he has created. We worship a god who goes to great lengths to make that kind of relationship possible. We worship a god who wants to know how we feel, whether it's a happy emotion or not. And we worship our God when we pray and when we sing, so let us make a joyful noise to the Lord. Amen and amen.