

Summer Sermon by Preston Wilson– July 28, 2024

Opening Words: Six Love Song Lyrics Unplugged

“Now I’ve heard there was a secret chord
That David played and it pleased the Lord
But you don’t really care for music, do ya?
It goes like this, the fourth, the fifth
The minor fall, the major lift
The baffled king composing “Hallelujah”

“As I walk this land of broken dreams
I have visions of many things
But happiness is just an illusion
Filled with sadness and confusion
What becomes of the broken hearted
Who had love that’s now departed...”

“The moment you walked inside my door, I knew that I need not look no more. I’ve seen many souls before – ah, but heaven must have programmed you.”

“I was all right for a while, I could smile for a while
Then I saw you last night, you held my hand so tight
When you stopped to say, “Hello...”
Oh, you wished me well
You couldn’t tell
That I’ve been crying over you...”

“If you had not a-fallen, then I would not have found you
Angel flying too close to the ground
And I patched up your broken wing
And hung around a while
Trying to keep your spirits up
And your fever down...”

“Time it was and what a time it was,
A time of innocence, A time of confidences
Long ago, it must be. I have a photograph
Preserve your memories; They’re all that’s left you”

(and I might ask, preserve your record collection too)

The Spiritual Power of Popular Music (II)

If I have chosen the right music, the performances I will now share with you are famous enough to be already known by most of the people here this morning. Our follow-up comments will no doubt be interesting, as we affirm or question my belief that popular love songs can be prayers that unite us in empathy with the singer’s authentic feelings and story.

k.d. lang performs Leonard Cohen’s iconic composition “Hallelujah” at the Vancouver, Canada Olympics Opening Ceremony. It is remarkable that this world event promoted a song which combines traditional religious signaling with sensual undertones. But it did, and “Hallelujah” has become one of our most resonant prayers of baffled appreciation.

Joan Osborne sings “What Becomes of the Broken-hearted?” From the documentary “Standing in the Shadows of Motown: The story of the Funk Brothers.” Once in a while a classic popular song is interpreted so well that it becomes something entirely new. Joan Osborne’s primal cries of anguish have

carried well beyond that one powerful and historic performance in Detroit eleven years ago. An urgent prayer seeking an answer to a very hard question.

Yusuf/Cat Stevens, Heaven/Where True Love Goes, (Live, Yusuf's Café Session, 2007). Regardless of what religion you might ascribe to him, no matter what missteps he made along the way, his contentment with where he has arrived is apparent now, and I trust him to tell me *his* truth in this prayer for love's endurance.

k.d. pays tribute to Roy Orbison's classic "Crying" at the Universal Amphitheater in Los Angeles on February 24, 1990. As with Roy's original rendition, this common story of unrequited love can leave audiences in tears, exhausted and grateful that a beautiful song and a human voice could touch them so deeply. For, whether we care to remember it or not, in one way or another, most all of us have been there. A prayer for help in understanding the insupportable.

Willie Nelson - Angel Flying Too Close to the Ground (Live at Budokan, Tokyo 2/23/1984). A beautiful story of love and graceful surrender, told with exquisite phrasing, along with Willie's signature guitar picking and an authentic voice like no other on the planet, all preventing us from doubting his quiet kindness. A prayer of qualified thanksgiving.

Simon and Garfunkel, Bookends/Overs in the Concert in Central Park 1981. Two voices, one guitar, and one harmonic song about growing old together in this prayer of wistfulness and quiet gratitude. "Time it was and what a time it was, a time of innocence, a time of confidences. Long ago it must be, I have a photograph. Preserve your memories. They're all that's left you."

(I'd just add, preserve your record collection.)

Closing words

A meditation on how we most meaningfully live in a swirl of hints of holiness
by T.S. Eliot from “Four Quartets” published in 1940

For most of us, there is only the unattended
Moment, the moment in and out of time,
The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts. These are only hints and guesses,
Hints followed by guesses; and the rest
Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.
The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.

So, what is that gift that transports us away from ourselves into another
sphere of awareness, that so persistently is giving us hints of our deeper
spiritual essence, offering us half-guessed moments of respite from our
disciplining minds? That allows us “the unattended moment” to hear
music “so deeply that it is not heard at all, but you *are* the music while
the music lasts.” Whatever it is, we are blessed to have at least the
chance to half understand it.

Amen

Preston Wilson, July 28, 2024

