

## “Sing Your Heart Out”

A Sermon by Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull

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It was almost two years ago that a family of wrens decided to homestead in our garage. Every morning since then, as my husband, Dan, or I set out to walk our dog, Google, we move through that garage, lift the door to head outside, and duck our head as those wrens zoom out into daylight. What happens next? Google charges out, but we pause, following the lead of the male wren who lights on a nearby branch before beginning his workday. There he sings his heart out.

“The soul has lifted moments above the drift of days,”

we sang earlier. This is one of them.

I believe there is no more divine way to greet the morning than to sing your heart out. The wren doesn't pause and shudder to think, “Uh-oh, I can't really sing.” or “I'll probably sing out of tune, and then the whole neighborhood will know I really can't sing.” He probably doesn't think about singing. He just opens his mouth and lets it out. Is it a familiar song? Does he sing the same one again and again, because why take chances once he's got one song down pat? I plead ignorance. It always sounds new to me.

On this summery spring morning, we gather to worship and discover, to our joy or concern (I'll let you decide that), that we've got some new songs on the docket. Of course they've been waiting here in the pages of our hymnal since it was published 15 years ago, but we can't rush things. Not for those of us who lean slowly into newness, especially when it applies to opening our mouths in song. Many of us – myself included – don't hesitate to open our mouths on other matters of import – our opinions about a recent meeting, our take on the state of the state, the weather, a book we're recommending, a movie we've just seen. Speech we have no problem with. But song? Another matter entirely, unless we're in the choir. And I'm not preaching to the choir, folks!

Sometimes I ask you to pretend you're Baptists! But we shouldn't have to. We as Unitarian Universalists can sing out as readily as we speak out! We might *aspire* to behave like Baptists when it comes to vocal adventure. My granddad is a case in point. No one I've ever known could launch into a hymn like Granddad Edwards. He had his favorites – “The Old Rugged Cross,” “Onward Christian Soldiers,” “He Leadeth Me,” all hymns familiar to those who grew up in that religious tradition and he did as the son of a Baptist preacher from Pontepool, South Wales. But he was also an *adventurer* with song.

I'm ready for the moment when being a Unitarian Universalist carries the same vocal expectation as being a Baptist – that when it comes to singing, we don't shrink from it. We let it go, as if a bold wren flies right out of our mouths and our song lifts skyward.

There was a time when you had never heard “Spirit of Life.” There was a time when “Silent Night” was a stranger to our ears. There was a time when “Lo, the earth awakes again” was a foreign sound, unless you had heard it first as “Jesus Christ has risen today!” There was a time when we hesitated before joining our voices in the aftermath of prayer with “Spirit of Life, come unto me.”

Wrens are not born singing. Neither was my Granddad. Neither are we. It’s an acquired practice, a discovered joy, this matter of singing your heart out.

Courage! Daring! At least equal to our houseguest, the wren! At least equal to my late grandfather! At least equal to our sisters and brothers, the Baptists!

Waiting for our fortitude is a song that I’ve not heard sung in this Meeting House, a song of the colors of spring. How can we simply gaze as silent witnesses on the cascade of color that spills onto the season? How can we not sing it? And why only in English? Here we might need some help, and our choir will oblige, as they sing *De Colores* in Spanish. But they’re counting on the rest of us joining in for the English verses. Let’s relish the season and the day with this next song that just might become one of your favorites. Who knows, maybe some wren feathers will flutter in applause as our voices sound out these windows, onto the Common, and across the treetops. Together, let’s sing our hearts out!

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**Sources:**

“De Colores,” Words: David Arkin, used by perm. Of Hodgkin Press; Music: Traditional Spanish folk, in *Singing the Living Tradition*, The Unitarian Universalist Association, Beacon Press, Boston, 1993, 305.

“The Morning Hangs a Signal,” Words: William Channing Gannet (1840-1923); Music: William Lloyd (1786-1852), in *Singing the Living Tradition*, The Unitarian Universalist Association, Beacon Press, Boston, 1993, 40.