

SERMON
July 7, 2019
The Reverend Dr. Phebe L. McPherson

Peace be to this house.

...Know this, "the kingdom of God has come near."

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

From the New York Times Online

Millions of people flocked to grab a spot on either side of the East River Thursday, hoping to get the best view of the Macy's 4th of July Fireworks that lit up the New York City skyline. ...The amazing spectacle lasted a half an hour and made an amazing colorful display up and down the river, and especially at the Brooklyn Bridge, where the show began with a shower of sparkles raining down from the landmark. ...As the sun set— red, white, and blue lights shone from several buildings in Lower Manhattan and along the Brooklyn waterfront. ...This year's show seemed grander than usual, because it was. ...Organizers said 70,000 aerial shells were used for the giant display, 10,000 more than the next largest show. ...The spectacle had three times more firepower— launching 3,000 shells a minute. ...The show was six months in the making, with the Macy's team first putting it to the test in the California desert.

The light show was over-the-top, breath-taking—the explosive color and light was choreographed like a ballet! Perfect timing. Perfect balance. Perfectly presented across a vast landscape of people, without a hitch. *Thanks in large part to the extensive efforts and preparations by the NYPD. They used a drone for the first time to keep an eye on the celebration.*

This year's event also had some high-powered musical performances as well, with Luke Bryan, Brad Paisley, Derek Hough, Ciara and Khalid and Jennifer Hudson.

The moment that captured me—made my heart stand still—was not the bombs bursting in air, but a song—*Somewhere over the rainbow*—sung by Jennifer Hudson. The cameras panned the crowd. I saw people of every age, skin-tone, and culture with that look on their face—that look. (I saw it here just a few minutes ago when we sang this song.) It's the same look I've seen on faces when good news is finally given. The same look I've seen on faces when recognition is granted. *Who, me?* The same look I've seen on faces when the answer is "Yes" instead of "No." It's all in the eyes, the rest of the body is still. It's an awakening. It's a moment of raised expectation—the ingredients of HOPE. Hopeful anticipation. It's about daring to expect something good will happen— that will effect you, directly.

Somewhere over the rainbow.

Is it a 7th major interval? An interval is the space between the notes. I thought it was a 7th, but then I realized it's a full octave. An 8th interval! Of course! It feels so good! Like *happy little blue birds*. C-C! It's all possible. The music itself says it without the words! Followed by notes that cascade down, ready and waiting, expecting to hit the octave again! But it is followed by a 6th major interval. Then, if you wait—there it is again, the 8th! And I thought, with tears welling up in my eyes—*This is what America is all about!* The fireworks are just the background. The icing on the cake. It's the music that speaks from the soul—of the place where hope is born and rises.

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I think what got me started on this —the soul power of music—was an experience some of us shared last week after church. Just about everyone was gone and a few of us were hanging out in the kitchen. We were talking...there's always some complicated things going on in our lives and I was reminded of a song, one of the first I remember liking and singing as a child—maybe five or six years old.

Que sera, sera! What will be, will be.

I guess it was popular on the radio in the early 50's. I couldn't get all the words, but Joe Martin remembered. Anna chimed in. Cheryl did too. And Maryellen. From who knows where, the words and the tune emerged. We kept singing. We laughed. Troubles seemed to vanish, to melt away. More songs emerged. We kept it up for 30 minutes or more. There was an amazing sense of comradery and love, and even courage. *Que sera, sera! The future's not our to see*, as the lyrics say, but in this moment... *Que sera, sera!*

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As the national DC July 4th festivities were being planned and controversies were being discussed, I was reminded of the time that Marian Anderson sang on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1939. Marion Anderson, the great African-American contralto who sang internationally with famous orchestras around the world. In 1939 the DAR's rejected an invitation for her to perform at Constitution Hall, but thanks to Eleanor Roosevelt, the concert was rescheduled for the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. I looked up her repertoire for the occasion. Among the songs was "*My Soul is Anchored in the Lord.*" Don't you wish you'd been there to hear her sing that song! *My Soul is Anchored in the Lord.* Music speaks from the soul—the place where hope is born and rises.

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So I did a little reading. After all, music is an integral part of most religions. The Psalms were written to be sung. Early songs of the church are embedded in the Gospels and in Paul's Letters. Music has been called "*the language of the soul, its most intimate and exalted expression*" (Peter Kwasniewski). I picked up a textbook about the principles of musical aesthetics (*The Philosophy of Music: A Comparative Investigation into the Principles of Musical Aesthetics*). And it gets even more interesting!

— *Music is the art of sound.*

— *It has direct and powerful influence over consciousness.*

— *Music arouses enthusiasm, stifles bodily fatigue, instills courage and endurance, animates the mind with gayety, or calms it when excited, to religious meditation and worship.*

— *Music deepens the note of sadness or heightens the touch of joy, adds fervor to religious worship, or can excite deeds of recklessness.*

It's not just psychological, its affects are physiological. Rhythm is organic. It affects emotions—even the functioning of vital organs. Its roots are deep developing from the emotional outcries of our primitive ancestors. This is powerful stuff. *Somewhere over the the rainbow*. It's not what may seem like just a simple song. In a flash, I saw something on those faces in the New York crowd—perhaps more powerful than 70,000 aerial shells of firepower.

It's the promise of America. *E pluribus Unum. Out of many, one*. Originally this meant, *out of 13 states, one nation*. Now it reflects the country's melting pot nature. *Out of many peoples, one American people*. A dream of freedom and equal opportunities.

*Where dreams that you dare to dream,
Really do come true.*

It's the *Octave Interval!* I saw on those faces. It is what American hope looks like.

For us, in this place— no matter what your circumstances, it is God through Christ who provides the *Octave Interval!* It is God in Christ who has brought us together and makes us one with brothers and sisters of every nation, race and creed.

Peace be to this house.

Ours is a *full octave* of peace.

Somewhere over the rainbow, way up high

*There's a land that I've heard of once in a lullaby
..And the dreams that you dare to dream,
Really do come true.*

Know this,

The kingdom of God has come near.

Amen.