

We have been blessed and our lives and souls are deeper and richer for it. Experiencing, as we have over the past ten days, the 44th Elora Festival, the Elora Singers have taken us from requiems to ballads, from chamber music to sacred texts, from Persian vocals to twilight reflections and Broadway hits, from poems by Rumi and letters by Clara Schumann to suspicious love songs to Michael the Latte Boy. The sound from the Elora Singers was heard in village greens and township barns, in churches and in parks, with texts in English, Latin, German and native tongues; and whether it was heard by children or seniors, newcomers or festival veterans we all have truly marvelled at your skill, passion, dedication and your seemingly undying stamina.

One newcomer to the Festival who attended the Twilight concert last Wednesday responded to my question, “How was that?” with an extended pause, and said “I’m so overwhelmed I’m speechless. But one thing I do know, my soul is full.”



So thank you to Mark, Jonathan and Chris, and all the members of The Singers for doing what you do best: filling our souls with your incredibly beautiful sound.

Lucy Winkett, Rector of St James’ Church, Piccadilly in London, wrote a book with a very compelling title, “Our Sound is our Wound.”

In it she argues that our lives are lived against the backdrop of internal and external soundscapes. The external sounds, noises and music with which we are surrounded in modern life have implications. There is also a soundtrack within us that plays constantly through memory, dreams, anxiety or thought. How you sift through all these sounds to listen to something that sustains you through the changes and chances of daily living can be very challenging.

If it’s about reaping a good harvest from what you’ve sown with your sound, the harvest of this Festival has reaped great rewards in our lives. It has helped us to dull the cacophony of our lives and fine tune our listening to hear something that is true. There we discover that our wounds are healed; and our souls are full.

But it doesn’t have to be all about good returns. In the story of the sower, it is curious that the sower seems hardly focused on generating just the right soil conditions to ensure good returns at all. In fact this business yields a return from only 25% of the

product. The other 75% of the distributed product is completely wasted. It suggests that this sower is less concerned about the return, and more concerned about getting the product out there. Clearly this sower has an endless supply of product as he could care less where it lands. His priority is to just get the seed out there. Spread the sound with reckless abandon all over the place in the hopes that something will take.

On the other hand, if it is about good return, then the focus is very different. The focus is not on spreading the seed generously, but on cultivating the right conditions, because we all know that the supply and resources are limited. With that orientation, we need to ask the question: how are we cultivating good conditions to flourish? Or, what conditions do you need to flourish at this stage of your life? All good questions if the focus is on return.

The first reading is filled with a promise of great return. “You shall go out with joy and be led back in peace, the mountains and hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.” The return here engages every fibre of creation. But the agent of this great return is located outside of the people and outside the system.

Look at Jesus’ birth. It was heralded by the angels and shepherds with great *joy*, and he was brought through a passion, death and descent into hell to enter the third day into a new creation when he’s able to

greet his followers with an astounding and unexpected word: “*Peace.*”

“*You shall go out with joy, and be led back in peace.*” Joy and peace are bookends for the incarnation.

This is the entire trajectory of the incarnation. That’s the whole purpose of Christmas and Easter: to bring us into God’s very self through an outside agent. And in so doing, regardless of where the seed falls, whether we are receptive to it or not, it still reaps a hundredfold. Because in any of our lives, with our limited supply we’re not going to ever exhibit the ideal conditions for growth all of the time; and that’s okay, because thankfully it’s not all up to us.

We come to church to be relieved of the heavy burdens we place upon ourselves and be reminded that actually this is God’s work, not ours. The biggest thing we can do is show up and offer ourselves again and again, with our limited supply of five loaves and two fish; or the one coin in the temple treasury; or the empty nets that Jesus asks us to throw on the other side of the boat after we’ve have fished all night and caught nothing. In so doing we become dislodged from the centre, and we discover that we can leave behind all the noise that fills our lives to be able to hear the one true calling to life. Once we get out of the way it becomes so much more liberating, and we discover that our lives become more fruitful for love.