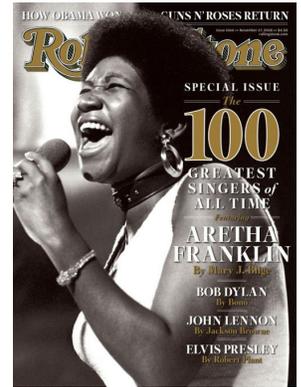




Wednesday, August 29, 2018  
6:30pm  
St. Mary's Episcopal Church



### Let's get started....

Today's current event is summarized on the opposite side. Let's read it silently and then review it together. The death of Aretha Franklin this past week got me to thinking about what it means to take the church with us into the world and let the gospel shape how we interact with the culture beyond the church. Aretha Franklin's story also caused me to think about how we can help the world around us change its tune.

Aretha Franklin's father, the Rev. C.L. Franklin, tells the story about a woman he'd encountered at the cleaners who told him that Aretha had done okay on a recent television show. "But I'll be glad," the woman said, "when she comes back to the church." But Pastor Franklin wasn't amused. He said, "Listen, ... If you want to know the truth, she has never left the church. All you have to do is have ... the ability to hear and the ability to feel, and you will know that Aretha is still a gospel singer!" He added that "the way she sings in this church she sings anywhere she sings." Of course, not everybody likes her music -- musical tastes differ widely -- and some would point out that not every detail of her life was exemplary of the Christian life. But many people seem to agree with the opinion of her father, that she took the church with her into the larger realm where she performed and let the gospel shape how she sang, and how she lifted the spirits of many.

### Let's get you involved....

1. In what ways do you take the church with you wherever you go?
2. What sorts of things make you suspect that someone you don't know but whom you see in public may be a church person?
3. What might it mean to be "shaped" by the gospel?
4. How, if at all, is the trajectory of Franklin's life -- ups/downs successes/failures, etc. -- significant for people who want to know what a Christian life lived looks like?

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When it came to announcing the death this week of Aretha Franklin, the headline that said it best was from Religion News Service: "Aretha Franklin Started With Gospel, Ended With Soul at Age 76."

Whoever penned that headline knows something about the spiritual flow of life as well as the poetry of the pulpit. What's more, in shorthand, that line communicated that Franklin's early singing debut was in the church and that in her career, she brought something of the church to the world.

Singer, songwriter and pianist Aretha Franklin, known for her gospel-rooted style and bluesy renditions of popular music, and ranked by *Rolling Stone* as the No. 1 greatest singer of all time, died August 16 at her home in Detroit, Michigan, surrounded by family and friends, succumbing to pancreatic cancer.

Franklin, who would eventually perform at the inaugurations of three presidents and at a visit of Pope Francis to Philadelphia, began her career as a child singing gospel at New Bethel Baptist Church in Detroit, where her father, C.L. Franklin, was minister.

In 1960, at the age of 18, she brought her four-octave vocal range and the righteous fervor of gospel songs to the secular music scene, where she achieved commercial success and acclaim with songs such as "Respect," "Chain of Fools," "Think," "(You Make Me Feel Like) a Natural Woman," "I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You)" and "I Say a Little Prayer." As early as the end of the '60s, she was being called the "Queen of Soul."

Despite that appellation, however, Franklin didn't fit neatly into a single musical genre. She recorded 112 charted singles on Billboard, including 77 Hot 100 entries, 17 top-ten pop singles, 100 R&B entries and 20 number-one R&B singles, becoming the most charted female artist in the chart's history and winning 18 Grammy Awards.

At the 1998 Grammy Awards, Franklin substituted for an ailing Luciano Pavarotti, performing "*Nessun Dorma*" by Puccini, unrehearsed, but to overwhelming effect.

Not all of Franklin's life was marked by success. She had two sons when she was a young teenager, and later was twice married and twice divorced. Her father was shot by burglars and he later died of those wounds.

Franklin was neither a central figure of the civil rights movement nor an overt feminist, but she energized both movements with her rendition of the song "Respect." She also performed at civil rights fundraisers for Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the 1960s and to benefit the efforts of the Rev. Jesse Jackson.

After Franklin's death was announced, tributes poured in from celebrities, musicians, politicians and people in many walks of life.

Some remarked on Franklin's ongoing connection with her Christian faith. Gospel singer CeCe Winans issued a statement saying that "Her imprint on the music culture has left a mark that cannot be erased."

Winans went on to say: "With all of her success she never forgot Detroit or her roots in the church and gospel music. Many have stood on her shoulders and the entertainment world owes a lot to this incredible gift."



**Y**ou can see all of those instincts, that assurance, that skill, in the footage of her performance of “America (My Country Tis of Thee)” at the Obama inauguration in 2009. From the moment she approaches the mic—decked out in a gray felt hat adorned with an enormous bow, a look-at-me hat that also says, “Wait ’til you hear me”—her sense of authority and her dignity are overwhelming. She reinvents even this song, one most of us have heard hundreds of times, turning it into an acknowledgment that even in a nation built on bloodshed and suffering, there is a vast capacity for good. No monarchies in this country—we don’t believe in that stuff. Yet for a time, this sweet land of liberty was graced with a queen. She sang her way through one of our nation’s most charged and challenging era, and we followed the sound of her voice. She taught us so much, just because it was pure joy to listen. (*Time Magazine*, September 10, 2018, p. 13)

**Question:** When did you first learn about, or listen to, Aretha Franklin?

**Let’s connect Aretha’s story with some scriptures...**

*He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD. (Psalm 40:3)*

**T**here are times when we need a new song to change the tune of what's going on around us. Do you remember when President Barack Obama delivered a touching eulogy, a rousing political speech and a thoughtful meditation on race in America when he traveled to Charleston, South Carolina on Friday, June 29, 2015 to speak at the funeral of the Rev. Clementa Pinckney, who was gunned down by a racist terrorist during Bible study? But the President's speech will be remembered for a moment at the end when he launched into a solo of "Amazing Grace," that at first stunned the mourners and then brought them to their feet as they joined him in song.



**Questions:** When have you seen someone lift the tone of a sorrowful or maybe deteriorating situation by injecting words of grace? Have you ever been able to do so?

*So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Tabitha had made while she was with them. (Acts 9:39)*



**T**his is just one verse from a story that tells of Peter raising a follower of Jesus named Tabitha from the dead. The account begins, "In Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity." When Peter arrived, the mourners showed him clothing Tabitha had made. The implication is not that they simply wanted to show Peter what a good seamstress Tabitha had been, but that she had made these items to help others. We might say that in this way, Tabitha took the church with her wherever she went.

**Questions:** Who do you know who is like Tabitha today? What makes you believe they truly serve the Lord? Are people more likely to hear the gospel when it is dressed in secular clothes than when it speaks with overtly religious language?

**To conclude....**

C.S. Lewis recognized the deep influence and mystery with which music communicates and inspires. It is no accident that Narnia’s creation itself comes through Aslan’s song. Here’s a quote:

“The Lion was pacing to and fro about that empty land and *singing his new song*. It was softer and more lilting than the song by which he had called up the stars and the sun; a gentle, rippling music. And as he walked and sang the valley grew green with grass. It spread out from the Lion like a pool. It ran up the sides of the little hills like a wave. In a few minutes it was creeping up the lower slopes of the distant mountains, making that young world every moment softer.” (*italics emphasis mine*)

Typical of this great man’s practical orientation, Lewis appears little interested in the abstract attributes of music. What interests him is its confluence with human existence. The following profound insight comes from his essay: “On Church Music.”

“There are two musical situations on which I think we can be confident that a blessing rests. One is where a priest or an organist, himself a man of trained and delicate taste, humbly and charitably sacrifices his own (aesthetically right) desires and gives the people humbler and coarser fare than he would wish, in a belief (even, as it may be, the erroneous belief) that he can thus bring them to God. The other is where the stupid and unmusical layman humbly and patiently, and above all silently, listens to music which he cannot, or cannot fully, appreciate, in the belief that it somehow glorifies God, and that if it does not edify him this must be his own defect.



Neither such a High Brow nor such a Low Brow can be far out of the way. To both, Church Music will have been a means of grace; not the music they have liked, but the music they have disliked. They have both offered, sacrificed, their taste in the fullest sense.” (From “Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and Music,” Mere Inkling.)

**Question:** What role, if any, does music play in your Christian walk? in your sense of devotion to God? Have you ever thought of a piece of music conveying the Christian message better than a sermon?

It just might be a timely thing to do — to speak to one or more of our parish’s choir members after a Sunday service and thank them for being something of an Aretha Franklin for those present.



Date	Meeting & Place
September 5	conTEXTS in chapel
September 12	SWEEP no conTEXTS
September 19	conTEXTS in parish hall
September 26	conTEXTS in parish hall

September 2018						
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