

[singing] God be in my head and in my understanding.

In the name of God who was and is and is to come.  
Amen.

The 150th Psalm, the final song in David's sublime list, perfect. Final psalm, Steve Townsend's final day of his sublime tenure in this place. Just ten days before our earth begins her slant aside from the source of our abundance. "Praise him with the blast of the ram's horn. Praise him with lyre and harp. Praise him with resounding cymbal. Praise him with loud clanging cymbal. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Hallelujah."

Oh it's perfect all right, but no, the psalm wasn't chosen for Steve's final day. It's appointed by the lectionary for every Trinity Sunday. Steve was chosen by St. James Church, by you and me. Steve was chosen by God because of what's in that psalm. When Mark and Steve suggested I preach on Steve's final day as St. James' music magician, Trinity Sunday, I demurred. Got the wrong guy.

The Trinity has always seemed to me an impenetrable mystery. As Steve knows all too painfully well, I never even learned to read music, but here we are. 25 years is a long time for anything. The marriage of St. James' music and Steve Townsend feels as if it ought to go on forever. Thanks. It was not always thus. Some may remember Steve's predecessor, Nelson Huber, the high wire act who'd show up on Sunday morning and suggest to the choir, "oh why not Handel's Messiah for the anthem this morning? You know it well enough." It was exciting.

Early in Steve's first year, a choir member visited me. He wasn't working out she said. Why I asked. "He doesn't think we know how to sing. We spend rehearsal doing scales. No more tough anthems." Shortly after Steve came and visited me. It's not working out he said. Why? "Because the choir wants to sing music they're not ready for." Well you know the rest. It was so worth the wait.

You wonder why music matters so much in church. Martin Luther wrote, "Whoever sings prays twice." Worship makes our rational minds freak out. Fear of being embraced by unfathomable mystery can put our timid hearts precariously out of tune. Spirit filled music can reset them. For Steve, making a joyful

noise is not only a matter of performance, but of preparing our fragile hearts for terrifying ecstasy, approaching the throne of God.

Arrive early for church and hear Steve in rehearsal explaining a phrase from the anthem inviting us into an encounter with the holy. Some have said that Steve's a perfectionist. No. Steve's a servant who understands God alone is perfect and his job is to try to reflect that. Religion is an odd beast. No one has seen God and lived. What we think we know of God is in fact our projection. What we hope, what we fear. Dueling projections can set up dueling agendas. A church can become a combat zone.

Music to the glory of God may bypass our anxious egos, rescue a parish from self-destruction. For a quarter century, Steve has never let whatever internecine battle threatened this parish distract him from that vision and now, oh, now God intoxicated leadership happily visited on our parish in this spirit filled chapter, why now we gather for divine worship. Not to test whose view will prevail.

Steve would probably be too modest to say so but I think he trusts the Spirit has given him leave of this demanding work he does so well while he and Glenn still have energy and enthusiasm for exploring more of God's world. The mysterious doctrine, the Trinity must mean there is no place we can hide from God's searching, searing love. For 25 years, Steve's music has flooded our conscious with that life altering reality.

Steve, I just can't imagine St. James Church without you. But who a generation ago could have imagined the breadth you have showed us of God's beauty? And so we thank God for you, never sparing yourself, sponsoring God's extravagant gift. We commend you and Glenn to a life flooded with the wonder you have so graciously visited on us.

[sung} God be at mine end and at my departing.

And so it is.