

July 30, 2020



I really love collecting hymnals. A good portion of shelf space in my music room at home is dedicated to storing all sorts of hymnals from many different denominations. There is quite a bit of overlap in many of these hymnals. We are unified with members of other Christian denominations who also sing great hymns like Holy, Holy, Holy, or All Creatures of Our God and King. It got me thinking last week as I looked at my shelf of hymnals - are there hymns that are embraced more by certain denominations?

How often is the Catholic church down the road singing a great hymn from the Hymnal 1982? We all can appreciate a jaunty Baptist hymn from time to time, right? We have a hymnal at St. Alban's that puts great emphasis on music composed by African American composers called Lift Every Voice and Sing: An African American Hymnal. I'd really like to share more with you, the St. Alban's community (and others who receive our Daily Cups), music from other traditions.

So here's the first one! We heard about this hymn a few weeks ago when Bishop Brown referenced it in his wonderful video sermon. Lift Every Voice and Sing was composed by John Rosamond Johnson, and the text was written by his brother, James Weldon Johnson. The song is a prayer of thanksgiving for faithfulness and freedom, with imagery evoking the biblical Exodus from slavery to the freedom of the "promised land." It is featured in 39 different Christian hymnals, and is sung in churches across North America. I hope you'll take a moment this morning to listen to this great hymn!

Lift Every Voice and Sing (with text): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONgOH_tq7-Q

Joel Pierce
Director of Choir and Organ Music
St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Cape Elizabeth