



Film Festival!
The Power of Music in the Midst of Difficult Times
Individual Reflection Version
(for Adults)

The theme for Advent and Christmas this year focuses on the power of music in our lives and in the history of humanity. Song and singing together has always been a way that communities feel connected and empowered together. We certainly have been experiencing the loss of not making music together as a church for a while. So this theme will help us dive deeper into our appreciation of music and its role in our lives.

The films in this series were chosen because they tell powerful stories of people who were uplifted by music in very difficult times. Some are historic, some are current. All are relevant to the times in which we live.

Please note that these films are not suited for young children because they depict some very disturbing times in history or difficult lives. There is also a Film Festival just for children as part of this series as well that uses children's Christmas classics. Let us know if you want access to those if you don't already.

We hope that our experience of these stories and our celebration of the power of music will remind us that we have a song to sing and we are called to sing and make sure everyone can as well!

Week 1 - Defiant Requiem

Click the photo to watch the trailer.

For more information, check out <https://www.defiantrequiem.org>

Watch the entire movie here:
Included with [Amazon Prime video](#)

(You can get a 30-day free trial of Amazon Prime if you do not already have this service)



You are invited to light a candle, then read the scripture and prayer for the day.

[Isaiah 40: 1-11](#)

[Mark 1: 1-15](#)

Let us pray.

Gracious God, gather us in and center us in the Spirit's presence.

Open us to your hope in the stories we have heard and in our own lives.

In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Introduction to the film –

This first week's film is called "Defiant Requiem." It was chosen because the theme song for our worship series "I Believe" is based on an anonymous poem, believed to be written by a Jewish person hiding from the Nazis in the 1940's. This week's documentary is also about that time period.

Defiant Requiem highlights the most dramatic example of intellectual and artistic courage in the Theresienstadt (Terezín) Concentration Camp during World War II: the remarkable story of Rafael Schächter, a brilliant, young Czech conductor who was arrested and sent to Terezín in 1941. He demonstrated moral leadership under the most brutal circumstances, determined to sustain courage and hope for his fellow prisoners by enriching their souls through great music. His most extraordinary act was to recruit 150 prisoners and teach them Verdi's Requiem by rote in a dank cellar using a single score, over multiple rehearsals, and after grueling days of forced labor. The Requiem was performed on 16 occasions for fellow prisoners. The last, most infamous performance occurred on June 23, 1944 before high-ranking SS officers from Berlin and the International Red Cross to support the charade that the prisoners were treated well and flourishing.

Reflection Questions – use these as prompts for your reflections

1. What was a particular moment or scene that surprised you or that resonated with you?
2. The conductor stated, “when common language can’t get even close to what it is we’re feeling, that’s when art begins.” Have you had an experience where art - whether it be music or another art form - has expressed what you are feeling more than words could?
3. One survivor from Schächer’s choir said that during the time of their performances they were “dancing under the gallows.” What do you think hope looks and feels like when facing such fear?
4. “Libera me” of Verdi’s Requiem includes,
*Deliver me, O Lord, from eternal death on that awful day,
When the heavens and the earth shall be moved:
When you will come to judge the world by fire.
I tremble, and I fear the judgment and the wrath to come,
when the heavens and the earth shall be moved.
The day of wrath, that day of calamity and misery;
a great and bitter day, indeed.
Grant them eternal rest, O Lord,
and may perpetual light shine upon them.*
What might these words have meant to those in Terezín? How might this meaning have been different from our understanding?

Please take a couple minutes to reflect and journal.

Fill in the blanks with words that those in the chorus at Terezin might have used to complete this statement (and how would you?):

“I believe _____, even when _____.”

Closing Prayer –

Holy One,
we thank you for the glimpses we catch
of your gift of untiring hope.
Even in the midst of fear,
of challenge, of struggle—
even when our view is obscured
by clouds of doubt,
ignite the flame of hope within us,
**People: ... that we might glow with its brilliance
from the inside out.**

Week 2 - Girls on the Wall



Click on the image to watch the YouTube trailer. Please be advised that this film has very strong language (not so much in the trailer). We encourage you to embrace the language as an act of deeper love and listening for greater understanding. Don't dismiss too soon.

Watch the entire movie here:

Rent 1.99 on [Amazon Prime Video](#)

You can also check out the "[Behind the Scenes](#)" clip on YouTube.

Light a candle, then read the scripture and prayer for the day.

[Isaiah 7: 1-14](#)

[Matthew 1: 18-25](#)

Let us pray.

God-with-us, gather us in and center us in the Spirit's presence.

Open us to your love in the stories we have heard and in our own lives.

In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Introduction to the film –

In this second week's film, *Girls on the Wall*, the teenage girls of Warrenville Prison are not your average delinquents. Having "graduated" from juvie to prison, these are the kids most likely to remain in the correctional system their whole lives. They are also some of the sharpest and most irrepressible young women you'll meet. When the girls of this heartland prison are given an unlikely shot at redemption — the chance to write and stage a musical based on their lives — they must relive their crimes, reclaim their humanity, and take a first step toward breaking free of the prison system.

Reflection Questions – use these as prompts for your reflections

1. What was a particular moment or scene that surprised you or that resonated with you?

2. When the girls wrote their individual stories, Whitney was reluctant to share. But she eventually wrote about her father,

*"It say, 'broken' which many of us are
Then I just put, 'you're an Indian Giver, dog.
You just give me money, you take it back*

*That ain't cool
You give me love, you take it back
That ain't cool either
You were my life, my smile
Now all I do is think, what if you were a different man
You could've accomplished many things
But yet instead, you love that pipe first
You loved your broad the same as that
But never showed me love at all."*

How do you think Whitney defines love? And what kind of love is she looking for from her father? Do you see this longing for love in her behavior toward others as well?

3. Our Gospel reading for this week includes background of Jesus' family and of his birth. What do we know about the backgrounds of the girls in Warrenville Prison? Does that affect how we hear their stories? Does it affect how they are understood and accepted in society?
4. Mrs. Palidofsky mentions that there are risks in telling one's story. What do you think are some of the risks? How do you think we can overcome those risks?
5. Over the course of Mrs. P's process, the girls took their own stories and together created one story for them to share in their musical. In what ways do we - in our lives, in our rituals, in our faith - blend our individual and collective stories?

Individual Reflection -

Please take a couple minutes to reflect and journal.

Fill in the blanks with how you think the girls in Warrenville Prison might complete this statement (and how would you?):

"I believe _____, even when _____."

Closing Prayer -

Holy One,
we thank you for the glimpses we catch
of your gift of daring love.
Even in the midst of fear,
of challenge, of struggle—
even when we cannot yet see a better day
when we will act like the human family we are,
ignite the flame of love within us,
**People: ... that we might glow with its brilliance
from the inside out.**

Week 3 - Following the Ninth

Check out the trailer by clicking on the image

You can [Watch](#) the film in its entirety on the director's YouTube channel



Light a candle, then read aloud the scripture and prayer for the day.

[Isaiah 57: 14-19](#)

[Luke 1: 1-4; 26-56](#)

Let us pray.

Loving God, gather us in and center us in the Spirit's presence.

Open us to your gift of joy in the stories we have heard and in our own lives.

In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Introduction to the film –

Filed on four continents, this documentary film looks at the global impact of Beethoven's hymn to humanity, his battle cry of freedom, his Ninth Symphony. The Ninth was at Tienamen Square in the Spring of 1989 during the student revolt. The same year, when the Berlin Wall came down, the Ninth was there to amplify the celebrations. Under the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, women marched on torture prisons with the Ode To Joy as inspiration. And in Japan, the Ninth was there to repair and heal after the devastating Tsunami of 2011. Following The Ninth is both inspirational and hard-hitting, and a testament of hope.

Reflection Questions – use these as prompts for your reflections

1. What was a particular moment or scene that surprised you or that resonated with you?
2. Billy Bragg reimagined Ode to Joy in his words:
*“See now like a phoenix rising from the rubble of the war,
Hope of ages manifested, peace and freedom evermore.*

*Brothers, sisters, stand together. Raise your voices now as one.
Though by history divided, reconciled in unison.*

*Throw off now the chains of ancient bitterness and enmity.
Hand in hand, let's walk together on the path of liberty.
Hark! A new dawn is breaking. Raise your voices now as one.
Though by history divided, reconciled in unison.*

*What's to be then, o my brothers? Sisters, what is in your hearts?
Tell me now the hopes you harbor.
What's the task and where to start?
Though speak ten million voices, every word is understood.
Furnish every heart with joy and banish all hatred for good."*

The word "joy" is not included in these lyrics until the end, but where else do you hear joy in this rendition?

3. The early Christian movement was an illegal movement at the time, and as an early Christian (much like those in this week's film who were part of movements for change), you could be punished for your allegiance. What motivated the early Christians to keep going? What motivated those who told their stories in *Following the Ninth*?

4. Throughout this film, this piece of music resonated throughout these four different events: at Tiananmen Square in 1989, in Chile, as the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, and in Japan each December following the tsunami. How did this piece resonate or relate to each event differently?

Individual Reflection -

Please take a couple minutes to reflect and journal.

Fill in the blanks with words that those in the film - in China, in Chile, in Germany, or in Japan - might have used complete this statement ((and how would you?):

"I believe _____, even when _____."

Closing Prayer –

Holy One,
we thank you for the glimpses we catch
of your gift of the depths of joy.
Even in the midst of fear,
of challenge, of struggle—
even when we are not sure
of your presence,
ignite the flame of joy within us,
**People: ... that we might glow with its brilliance
from the inside out.**

Week 4 - Sweet Honey In The Rock: Raise Your Voice!



At this writing, we have not been able to find a movie trailer for but documentary but this YouTube video is a great introduction to this singing ensemble.

Rent the documentary for \$1.99 on [Amazon Video](#).

Light a candle, then read the scripture and prayer for the day.

Isaiah 9: 2-7

John 1: 1-18

Let us pray.

God of hope and love and joy, gather us in and center us in the Spirit's presence. Open us to your find your peace in the stories we have heard and in our own lives. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Introduction to the film –

A description of this week's film, from the Director, Stanley Nelson: Emerging from the strong tradition of Freedom Singers, Sweet Honey in the Rock is a group that's as soulfully rich as it is provocative. Using song to stand in unison, five African American women sing solely a cappella, along with a sign language translator. Their music evokes stories from the past, encourages introspection in the present, and inspires progress for the future. Since it was founded in 1973, over twenty different women have contributed to the Grammy Award-winning group's distinct sound, which embraces semblances of gospel, blues, and hip hop, all with a political tone. The film features a trove of concert and rehearsal footage as it follows the group on their thirtieth anniversary tour, which is also coincidentally when founder Bernice Johnson Reagon announces she will retire. Through a variety of interviews with members, historians, and fellow artists, the film explores the roots of Sweet Honey in the Rock's existence and influence.

Reflection Questions – use these as prompts for your reflections

1. What was a particular moment or scene that surprised you or that resonated with you?

2. Is a story told differently when shared in song? Is a story heard differently when experienced in song? How so?
3. One of Sweet Honey in the Rock's classic pieces is "Ella's Song." This piece, with words from freedom fighter Ella Baker, was set to music by Bernice Johnson Reagon, and released in 1988:

*We who believe in freedom cannot rest
We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes
Until the killing of black men, black mothers' sons
Is as important as the killing of white men, white mothers' sons
That which touches me most
Is that I had a chance to work with people
Passing on to others that which was passed on to me
To me young people come first
They have the courage where we fail
And if I can but shed some light as they carry us through the gale."*

What words still resonate over 30 years later? What could they teach us about peace today and what we are called to do in this moment?

4. Part of this film was the story of how Bernice Johnson Reagon, who had been with Sweet Honey in the Rock since the beginning, moves on to retirement. Even though she is the only remaining original member, the group remains strong as she passes the torch. What does it take to build something that lives beyond your involvement? How does the group move forward, and how could this be a model for discerning transition, change, and leadership?

Individual Reflection - Please take a couple minutes to reflect and journal.

Fill in the blanks with words that those who Sweet Honey in the Rock first sang to might have used complete this statement (and how would you?):

"I believe _____, even when _____."

Closing Prayer –

Holy One,
we thank you for the glimpses we catch
of your gift of peace on earth.
Even in the midst of fear,
of challenge, of struggle—
even when we aren't sure that
goodwill among us can be found,
ignite the flame of peace within us,
**People: ... that we might glow with its brilliance
from the inside out.**

Week 5 - The Singing Revolution

Click on the image to see the trailer.

Available on [Vimeo On Demand](#) for \$3.99

Or on [Amazon Prime Video](#) for \$3.99

See [bonus features](#) (director's commentary and interview with the filmmakers).



[Lots of information](#) about the film.

Light a candle, then read the scripture and prayer for the day.

[Isaiah 61:10 - 62:3](#)

[Luke 2: 22-40](#)

Let us pray.

Creator God, gather us in and center us in the Spirit's presence.

Open us to your promise in the stories we have heard and in our own lives.

In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Introduction to the film –

Most people don't think about singing when they think about revolutions. But in Estonia song was the weapon of choice when, between 1987 and 1991, Estonians sought to free themselves from decades of Soviet occupation. During those years, hundreds of thousands gathered in fields to sing forbidden patriotic songs and to rally for independence. The Singing Revolution documents how the Estonian people regained their freedom and helped topple the Soviet Union along the way.

Reflection Questions – use these as prompts for your reflections

1. What was a particular moment or scene that surprised you or that resonated with you?

2. The film states that heroes in Estonia are different from how much of the world defines a hero. "In Estonia, fairy tale heroes are not brave noblemen who slay dragons and save damsels. Their hero is the shrewd old barn keeper who sits by the fire, waits, watches, and acts only when the time is right." How does this model of a hero help Estonians through these times? How do our current cultural models of heroes affect us? What can we learn

from the Estonians' type of hero?

3. The Estonian National Anthem “Mu isamaa, mu õnn ja rõõm” was written in the 19th century and later set to music.

*“My fatherland is my love, and I want to rest,
I lay into your arms, my sacred Estonia!
Your birds will sing me to sleep,
you will bloom flowers from my ashes,
my fatherland, my fatherland!”*

How do these words evoke hope, love, joy, and peace? And with this, how do these words sustain a revolutionary movement?

4. The prophet Isaiah says, “for Zion’s sake I won’t stay silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I won’t sit still.” Do you see this refusal to stay silent in the people of Estonia? How might “not staying silent” look in different times and cultures, including today?

5. Throughout this series, we have experienced stories where music was central in revolution, singing was weapon, a chorus was liberating, song was the glue that connected people. How did music do this? And how could song help us, even now?

Individual Reflection -

Please take a couple minutes to reflect and journal.

Fill in the blanks with words that the Estonians who sang under Soviet occupation might use complete this statement (and how would you?):

“I believe _____, even when _____.”

Closing Prayer –

Holy One,
we thank you for the glimpses we have caught
throughout this season of Advent and Christmas
of your gifts of hope, love, joy, and peace.
Even in the midst of fear,
of challenge, of struggle—
even when we have not been sure of tomorrow,
you have ignited the Light within us,
**People: ... and we have glowed with its brilliance
from the inside out.**