

Week 1 - The Singing Revolution

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 _____."

Week 2 - Girls on the Wall

Introduction to the film –

In this second week's film, *Girls on the Wall*, the teenage girls of Warrentville 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 are 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 Warrentville 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 Warrentville Prison might complete this statement (and how would you?):

"I believe _____, even when _____."

Week 3 - Following the Ninth

Introduction to the film –

Filmed 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 Tianamen 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 _____.”

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

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."

4. 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?

5. 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 _____."

Defiant Requiem (Full Video is No Longer Available)

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 Schächter'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 _____."