

The Response

Houston Hodges, for Writer's Corner, WLRH Radio Huntsville, AL USA

I have a son who's musical, and sings around here and there, including with the chorus of the Philadelphia opera, and some church gigs. He decided to try something new, when he was visiting us: he'd sing an extemporaneous response to the scripture at our church, the same way a preacher does in something called a sermon; so he did that... and the result was riveting.

I had asked our pastor for the scriptures she was going to preach from, a couple of weeks earlier. She provided them, and I sent them to Chris. He mused and reflected and fiddled with them, but not too much: he wanted it to be fresh and original and unique!

The Sunday came; the Bible parts were read; and Chris stood up to sing. A pause – a deep breath – and here it came: deep, mellow, thoughtful, reverent – without accompaniment – but to rapt attention, without a sound from the flock. Absolutely great... and I'd never heard anything like that before.

It could be modified; a sculptor could take a lump of clay, and mold a response to the Sermon on the Mount, or a dancer could dance the Shepherd Psalm, or a painter could sketch a reaction to Ruth and Boaz falling in love in the grain field ... but this version was really great, and had never been heard before anywhere! Alas, it will never be heard again, either, but that's the name of that tune.

May it continue, as artists respond to the great texts of humankind... to the Emancipation Proclamation, or Mandela's speech as he walked out of the prison on Robin Island, however humans react as they hear and remember and reflect on magnificent words with their own unique reactions to that greatness.