

'A Well-Tuned Heart'
Address by Father Lee Taylor
Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod
Sunday 13th July 2025
St Collen's Church

In nomine...

Ok. Musical daredevils.

Here's how it works: I'm going to sing the first line of a song...and if you know what comes next...then...surprise me!

(I sing the first line of five different songs)

What a lovely sound! That warmth...the recognition!

That's the power of coming together.....that sudden closeness that comes when voices meet around a melody. That's the miracle of music.

For one fleeting moment, we are not separate notes. We become a chord. And somewhere in that vibration, the universe whispers:

"This is how you're meant to be."

There's a story of a vicar who insisted on singing the solo at the Easter service, undeterred by the fact that every time he rehearsed it, the church's livestream lost connection and a pigeon fell dead out of the bell tower.

After the service, a brave parishioner approached and said,

"That was..something, vicar. Quite moving. Like I was transported somewhere else entirely."

"Jerusalem?" the vicar asked, hopeful.

"No," she replied. "To the Book of Amos, chapter 5, verse 23."

So the vicar fumbled for his bible to check out the citation which read:

"Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen."

Even the divine, it seems, has an ear for harmony and coherence.

But when we *are* in tune - when voices align not just in pitch, but in purpose, something sacred happens.

Something more than melody.

Something more than sound.

It's resonance!

Centuries ago, an old hymn described it perfectly:

“And with a well-tuned heart sing thou the songs of love.”¹

A well-tuned heart! What a beautiful image. The musician's metaphor.

It speaks deeply to the soul, because when a heart is out of tune, we feel it, don't we? And, like an instrument, our hearts need constant tuning—regular, careful, and intentional.

A well-tuned heart doesn't just sing in *pitch*, it sings in *love*.

A well-tuned heart doesn't just sing in *tune* — it *lives* in tune.

That's what we're really aligning with.

To bring our hearts, our breath, our attention, our presence... into harmony.

For centuries, spiritual traditions across the world have taught that the heart is more than a muscle - it's a compass, a tuning fork, a seat of wisdom.²

Science now confirms this ancient intuition.

The HeartMath Institute in California has studied this for decades.

¹The hymn, 'Ye Holy Angels Bright' first appeared in 1681, written by Richard Baxter (1615-1681). It received a Victorian revision by John Gurney (1802-1862). The tune is 'Darwall's 148th', composed around 1770 by John Darwall (1731-1789) for Psalm 148.

² Eastern spiritual traditions teach of the heart chakra or Hridaya centre; Catholic devotion to the Sacred Heart centres on Christ's wounded love as an invitation to compassion; In the ancient near east/mesopotamia, the heart (Libbu) was seen as the core of emotion, cognition and moral agency. Just to give a few examples.

They call it *heart coherence*.

It's a state — measurable, physical — when your heart rhythm, nervous system, mind and emotions all move in sync.

And the effects are real:

- Stress softens
- Thinking clears
- The immune system strengthens

On a monitor, it even looks like music — a smooth, wave-like rhythm.

The heartbeat of a person in harmony.

And here's the magic: coherence is contagious.

When choirs sing, when friends laugh, when strangers sway to the same beat, out *heartbeats* begin to *entrain*. We become a living symphony.

We lift.

You've felt it this past week..... We all have.

We are tuning.

A few weeks ago, I was conducting some research in the British Library in London and discovered the Sound Archive's Listening Booth.

You step into a small booth, put on headphones — and you're transported:

Bustling recordings of street sounds from Cairo to Kolkata;

A collection of British regional accents and dialects;

Global sacred music from Sufi chants to Gregorian chants to Buddhist temple bells.

There's even birdsong — slowed down to reveal hidden musical structures. What normally sounds like chirps becomes a galactic hymn.

Six and a half million recordings.

A living archive of the human (and non-human) soundscape.

It reminds us:

The world is always singing.

All we have to do... is *tune in*.

And what helps us tune in most easily?

Music.

And laughter.

I love the story of Samuel Wilberforce who was once bishop of Winchester. One day he was walking down Windsor High Street with the Dean of Windsor when they came across a small boy jumping up and down, struggling to reach a doorbell.

Ever the kindly bishop, Wilberforce stepped forward and said,

“Let me help you with that, young man.”

“Thank you,” said the boy politely.

So Wilberforce gave the bell a good, loud pull. The boy beamed, nodded, and then turned on his heels, yelling: “Now run like hell, mister!”

We forget this sometimes — to laugh — in the blur of deadlines and notifications and doing.

But these moments — a laugh shared, a chorus sung in harmony — they are not diversions from life.

They *are* life.

They are what I call *tuning* moments.

And so, here we are.

At the close of the Llangollen International Eisteddfod — a festival of peace, of resonance, of song.

Voices from Zimbabwe to Wales, Portugal to New Zealand.

Each carrying a distinct frequency.

But singing toward something shared.

It's not *sameness* we need — it's resonance!

Difference that sings in tune.

Like the harmonies of a great choir: Distinct notes, woven into one sound.

We are not just voices. We are *instruments*.

And we are meant to be played — *together*.

By what?

By life.

By love.

With well-tuned hearts.

By tuning ourselves into that great tuning force some call God... and others might simply call spirit, source, the universe, or the infinite musician behind it all.

Whatever your name for it —

It hears harmony.

And it responds.

So let me leave you with three final notes to carry this morning:

Firstly: Tune your heart — not just your voice. Sing with kindness. Speak with presence. Love with rhythm.

Secondly: Honour your difference and the difference of others — and bring into balance and harmony, remembering that we are all unique expressions of The One! You don't have to be *the same* to sing together.

Thirdly: And never underestimate the power of shared joy.

Because when we laugh, sing, or even breathe in unison —

We are not escaping the world.

We are healing it.

AMEN.