



If I had a hammer – pastor Jerry

Is it legal to sing “Happy Birthday” without recognizing the copyright owner? Yep, but it’s a “new” development. Since a 2015 court case we can now all sing “Happy Birthday” without paying Warner/Chappell Music licensing fees. Isn’t that crazy?

The old joke says: What do you call 200 lawyers at the bottom of Tampa Bay? A good start. Of course, that’s not true but it highlights the low regard most have for the legal industry. I have many friends who are good lawyers, judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys. I’ve also tangled with a few “lowlifes” including one who baker-acted his mother to get at her assets.

We need laws that create and protect a community that lives out Micah 6:8, “O people, the LORD has already told you what is good, and this is what he requires: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.” In a nation blessed with diversity that must be done in a non-sectarian way – without particular favor to one religious or political persuasion.

It’s hard to imagine that “Happy Birthday,” a folk song celebrating a regular event all lucky enough to survive our current abortion laws, could be controlled by a legal industry deeply embedded in our form of government. But, so much is.

Folk songs flourish in times like these. Maybe you know “If I Had a Hammer” written by Pete Seeger and Lee Hays in 1949 (there’s your legal notice). Thirteen years later Peter, Paul, and Mary recorded a version that had much greater success.

“If I had a hammer” – we do; we all have a voice. “I’d hammer in the morning” – as awareness dawns (again) that the status quo benefits some at great expense to others. “I’d hammer in the evening” – as we challenge and change our culture and self. “All over this land” – as we face the coming urban flight that accompanies pandemics and social unrest.

“I’d hammer out love between my brothers and sisters, all over this land” – and that cannot be done by the military, government, lawyers, politicians – or religious institutions that are rigid parts of a crumbling past. It’ll be done by folks writing and singing and living simple songs about a shared life together – a beautiful symphony of strength found in diversity.

Go ahead, I dare you, sing “Happy Birthday” to a new song. Work to change unjust written and unwritten laws of race and religion, greed and lust, hatred and anger. Just a thought: the anvil is found in your heart, your family, community, state, nation, and world.

We don’t need legal eagles to pile on more laws or anarchists (by any other name) to naively dismantle police departments or “burn it (the system) down.” We need poets and song writers and common folk with common sense to do what we’ve always done in times like these – hammer out a solution that works for all for now. That is what the LORD requires.