

May 30, 2010 Thematic Service – “The Church in the World”
Rehearsal – Tuesday, May 25 @ 7:00 P.M.

Welcome & Announcements (Steve Parmer)

CONGREGATION STANDING

CTW – Psalm 33:12-32 (Steve Parmer)

I am not sure that when the average church member thinks of the word "church" that he immediately thinks of something that existed in the mind of God from eternity past to be instrumental in bringing back to Himself a fallen, disrupted and fractured creation. Before we explore the value of how the world sees the church, perhaps, we should spend a little time preparing ourselves by considering how the church sees the church - how you and I see ourselves not simply in community with one another in this or that particular place, but also how (or if) we see all of this as part of an eternal cosmic cause.

Key of A

Shine, Jesus Shine

Lord, the light of Your love is shining in the midst of the darkness shining; Jesus, Light of the World, shine upon us, set us free by the truth You now bring us, Shine on me, shine on me.

Refrain: Shine, Jesus, shine, fill this land with the Father's glory; Blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire. Flow, river flow, flood the nations with grace and mercy. Send forth Your Word, Lord, and let there be light

Lord, I come to Your awesome presence, From the shadows into Your radiance; By the blood I may enter Your brightness, search me, try me, consume all my darkness, Shine on me, shine on me.

As we gaze on Your kingly brightness, So our faces display Your likeness; Ever changing from glory to glory, Mirro'd here may our lives tell Your story, Shine on me, shine on me.

CONGREGATION SEATED

Segue – My Country, 'Tis of Thee

In 1931, President Herbert Hoover signed a congressional resolution that made “*The Star Spangled Banner*” this nation’s official national anthem. That song, of course, commemorates the survival of the flag that flew over Fort McHenry when it was under siege by the British during the War of 1812. But, for nearly a century prior to that, the *de facto* national anthem was a hymn of gratitude and praise to God written by a Baptist minister.

Samuel Francis Smith knew German. Lowell Mason, the father of American Music Education did not. Mason asked Smith to go through some German songbooks and either translate the lyrics or come up with new ones. Smith was impressed by a tune that turned out to be the same as the one to which England’s national anthem is set, though it is not clear that Smith knew this at the time. He chose to write his own patriotic hymn. The song reflects Smith’s sentiment that many Americans in the early decades of the nation shared – not that America was any kind of a holy or chosen nation in the sense of a restored Israel, but that God did have a hand and a purpose in the circumstances that led to her formation, a purpose touching on humanity’s yearning to live free. That’s a fairly simple belief.

To this day, I run across comments that lament that “*My Country 'Tis of Thee*” did not become the official national anthem. Perhaps, one of the reasons this did not happen was not because of its sacred content so much as because through the decades, all sorts of additional verses had been written by various groups and individuals to promote this or that social or political agenda. There were verses about temperance, prohibition, women’s rights and the abolition of slavery. In the political climate of the day, perhaps, Congress judged that the tune prompted as many competing passions as unifying ones.

But, it is preserved in hymnals today, with only Smith’s original lyrics in tact – a prayer of acknowledgement of the nation’s religious moorings when it came into being and a prayer voicing the desire that it might endure as a bastion of freedom ...

CONGREGATION STANDING

Key of F

My Country, 'Tis of Thee

My country 'tis of thee, Sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing: Land where my fathers died, Land of the pilgrim's pride, From ev'ry mountainside Let freedom ring!

Our fathers' God to Thee, Author of liberty, to Thee we sing: Long may our land be bright With freedom's holy light; Protect us by Thy might, Great God, our King!

Worship Prayer (*Karl Crouch*)

Father, firstly, we are your people and the sheep of your hand. But, by grace, you have made us citizens of a land conceived in a vision of liberty. We thank you for that and for the blessings that go hand in with that. On this weekend of Memorial Day, we thank you for those through the years who made the ultimate sacrifice not only to secure those freedoms but also to maintain them.

Now, we are compelled to examine ourselves as we worship this morning. Are we making the most of the freedoms we enjoy? As Christians, have we treated these freedoms as ends, in and of themselves, or have we used them responsibly to advance Your kingdom by proclaiming those things that we profess to believe – that eternal salvation is in the blessed Name of Jesus, and that at the end of this age, He will come to judge the nations and to bring all of mankind into account. Has our desire to maintain our freedoms for their own sake found us in anyway hesitant to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ, fearful that we might lose those freedoms? Have we remained mindful that our highest calling is as the salt of this earth and the light of this world? Has your church in this nation in anyway squandered these grand opportunities by ceasing to be a conspicuously holy people, having become, rather, a weak, flabby and comfortable people who have taken these amazing freedoms very much for granted.

Father, give us the wisdom and the resolve to live as Your people in this age – as salt and as light. Find us truly repentant for having failed to that.

In Jesus' Name, amen.

Key of G

There Is No Other Name

There is no other name by which men can be saved, there is no other name under Heaven there is rest for my soul and the wounded made whole, and the captives set free and forgiven. **(repeat)**

Bridge: *Such love as I had never known, I've found in the grace that flowed to me in my unrighteousness; This is why my heart and soul and tongue confess.*

There is no other name by which man can be saved, there is no other name under Heaven; For there is rest for my soul and the wounded made whole, and the captives set free and forgiven. **Repeat Bridge – then, second verse twice**

All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name

All hail the pow'r of Jesus' name! Let angels prostrate fall; Bring forth the royal diadem, And crown Him Lord of all; Bring forth the royal diadem, And crown Him Lord of all!

Let ev'ry kindred, ev'ry tribe, On this terrestrial ball, To Him all majesty ascribe, And crown Him Lord of all; To Him all majesty ascribe, And crown Him Lord of all!

O that with yonder sacred throng We at His feet may fall! We'll join the everlasting song, And crown Him Lord of all; We'll join the everlasting song, And crown Him Lord of all!

Scripture and Prayer – Psalm 98 (*Steve Parmer*)

CONGREGATION SEATED

Comments on Psalm 98 and “Joy to the World”

It would have come as news to the composer of the most published Christmas Carol of the twentieth century that his song even *WAS* a Christmas Carol. Based on *Psalms 98*, it arguably has more to do with the Second Coming of Jesus than with His advent in the flesh as the Baby born in Bethlehem. There are none of the familiar images of nativity – no angels, no manger, no virgin mother, no shepherds, no wise men and no star. It is a song about the eternal Ruler of the World in His role as the eternal Ruler of the World when He comes to fully establish His reign which is only detected for now in a spiritual sense. As the church of Jesus Christ, we have been left in this world to proclaim the coming of Creation's King, to play a part not unlike John the Baptist played when Jesus appeared the first time. Then, I would simply challenge us collectively, "Do we understand that?" - "Have we given ourselves completely over to that?" - and - "If not, will we commit ourselves to that today?"

I was sure that would be enough of an explanation for you to not be too "weirded out" at the notion of singing what is regarded as a Christmas staple on the final Sunday in May. I was wrong. I found that I cannot even distance myself from Christmas when I sing this song as I know it, so how can I expect you to think in more eternal and cosmic terms. So, we're changing the tune. There's a reason I occasionally do that. If you grew up in church, there are no doubt some hymns that you sing without even thinking about them. If I was running bare-footed through cold, deep mud, with a bear chasing me, I could sing all four verses of "*Joy to the World*" without stumbling on a single word. And, I would still need to make some concerted effort to actually focus on those words.

Tweaking the tune helps me to scrutinize those words a little more. And, I think the tune that I selected is adequately majestic and regal that it still does justice to the to this great theme of a cosmic King to Whom all creation will one day bow and Whom we, as His church, have been called to represent and to proclaim.

CONGREGATION STANDING

Key of Bb

Joy to the World (to *I Sing the Mighty Power of God*)

Joy to the world! the Lord is come; Let earth receive her King; Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room, And heav'n and nature sing; And heav'n and nature sing, And heav'n and nature sing; Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room, And heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! The Savior reigns; Let men their songs employ; While fields and floods, rocks hills and plains, Repeat the sounding joy; Repeat the sounding joy, Repeat the sounding joy, While fields and floods, rocks hills and plains, Repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground; He comes to make His blessings flow Far as the curse is found; Far as the curse is found, Far as the curse is found; He comes to make His blessings flow, Far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace, And makes the nations prove; The glories of His righteousness, And wonders of His love; And wonders of His love, And wonders of His love; The glories of His righteousness, And wonders of His love.

Transition to Key of D (or just stop & start)

There Is a Redeemer

There is a Redeemer, Jesus, God's own Son, Precious Lamb of God, Messiah, Holy One.

Refrain: Thank You, oh my Father For giving us Your Son, And leaving Your Spirit 'til the work on earth is done.

Jesus, my Redeemer, Name above all names, Precious Lamb of God, Messiah, hope for sinners slain.

CONGREGATION SEATED

Message (*Karl Crouch*)

How Does the World See the Church (and Does It Matter)?

A beggar approaches a grandmother at the beach with his hands out. "Please, señora," the poor man pleads, "I haven't eaten all day."

"Good," says the grandmother. "Now you won't have to worry about cramps when you go for a swim."

According to a *Reader's Digest* survey in January, that is *THE* funniest joke in Spain ... so there!. What is not so funny is that in the west and the minds of too many people, that grandmother serves as a metaphor for the church. One expects tenderness and mercy, but finds only indifference. A great debate rages as to what is the church's supreme mission in the world. Is it mercy and justice? Or, is it bringing the truth of Christ to bear upon the world? If I am forced to choose a major, it has to be preparing folks for heaven, but there is plenty of room for mercy.

I have a friendly acquaintance who likes to tweak me *via* email about my beliefs. He doesn't upset me because he never disrespects me. Whether he is searching himself or is trying to get me to scrutinize my own beliefs, I am not sure, but I do enjoy the verbal sparring. He is not a scoffer. He is not hostile like those who like to blast the church for her materialism and hypocrisy while posturing themselves as benevolent. A lot of those folks turn out to be mere blowhards who want to feed the world with everybody else's money but seldom with their own personal fortunes.

My electronic pen pal is, in fact, compassionate and content with what he has to a degree that, frankly, ought to shame many of us. His hang-up with our ilk of Jesus-follower seems to be tied to the notion that if we did what Jesus taught, there would be no hungry people left in the world.

One recent exchange began when he attached an article entitled: "Jesus: the Last Communist". Predictably, the author appealed to a number of the compassion quotations of Jesus as well as to how the ancient church in Jerusalem cared for its own, implying that the flaws with historical efforts toward communism were the stinkers in charge and not the system itself. Who knows? The article lost me when it closed on a clear insinuation that Jesus' thoughts on social justice were why He was killed. He overlooked that nagging little detail that He claimed to be God.

So, bear with me for a few excerpts from our exchange. There are a great many people whose criticisms of the Lord's church don't interest me in the least. But, since I detected intellectual honesty and a sense of fair play, I chose to participate in this exchange. Responding to the article I wrote:

"...You'll notice that the author's *Acts 2* reference described the Jerusalem church community, and not Jerusalem ... at large. A lot of churches take care of their own needy, and many churches and individual Christians reach out beyond their own communities ... Of course, even in the most caring of such communities, exploitation of the generosity of others was "*anathema*". (I figured he might have to look up "*anathema*." If someone's going to "poke fun" at me, they are going to have to work at it. I continued ...)

"What Jerusalem practiced was also uncoerced, from the heart; not a condition to which many Marxists or Communists have shown themselves to be very open. That's really the crux of what separates 1st Century Jerusalem (and anywhere else it is replicated) from top-down statist regimism.

"Jerusalem also had a little broader agenda in mind for people than just meeting their physical needs (He {the author of the article} should have kept his *Act 2* quote going through verse 47). They had eternal needs in mind as well. That little "atheism" proviso that separates historical communism from first-century Christianity is probably a tad bigger than the author may acknowledge.

"So, the author weighs in like the rest of us without resolving anything. Statism disincantifies self-reliance and destroys economies. Admittedly, too many Christians wage a misguided battle against communist principles to the shameful point of getting distracted from the cries of the truly needy. And, so it goes ...

"Keep tweaking me. It's always fun. Stay in touch ..."

He responded to me:

"I'm glad you wrote 'Admittedly, too many Christians wage a misguided battle against communist principles' and mentioned 'statism'. I get steamed when *some* (a particular movement recognizable by its moniker) howl about commies and socialists, referring to brutal dictatorships that were really neither. I recently crawled through this (talking about an online link). It made my head spin and made me realize there are 57 varieties of communism and even the commies can't agree on what it is! ...

"... Agreed, Jesus wouldn't be happy with "historical communism"; but I think he would be pretty unhappy with capitalism. It's a cancer and unsustainable.....can't think of any useful alternative to some form of socialism. I've been trying to figure out a way for society to function without money but my brain just locks up....anyway, THANKS! You made my day!"

I replied:

"Save your brain the trouble. It doesn't exist. The ultimate flaw of capitalism is often the same as that of socialism ... fallen people trying to make it work without God. That's why I save my most idealistic expectations for local church communities."

To which he wrote:

"Would it be fair to say that religion has failed? From a Christian perspective, and letting them off the hook for the first thousand years, they've had a thousand to get the job done aaaannd here we are!"

So, clearly, he thinks feeding the world is why we exist. To which I replied:

"Failed? I guess that depends on what one understands the role of religion to be. I cannot say that Christianity has failed."

He wrote:

"I might settle for a marginal victory over suffering and want. I see the church as our conscience, not just preparation for the hereafter; and it doesn't seem to have the necessary influence. Even most Christians aren't buying the message-they care more about the condition of their lawns!"

Here I could get defensive or just play it out. I answered:

"Replying from vacation just outside of Boston ... your kind of people, right? ;)"

"I cannot defend or make excuses for how often the church misses the mark or squanders her moral authority ... However, the idea that the church's supreme mission is to end human suffering in the here and now is an invention of liberation theology. Before that notion came about, Christianity *WAS* concerned firstly with the hereafter (that "gain the whole world" *versus* "lose the soul" issue). Having said that, we are to be clothed with compassion and to do good to all men, but even then, our priorities rest with the household of believers.

"I hope the modern church in the west will soon come to a point of repentance and recapture her passion for Christ's kingdom as well as her moral authority in the world. Still, from an historical perspective, to whom should she apologize? What entity in the history of the world has done more to introduce compassion to a heartless world, whether it is feeding people, caring for the infirm, providing for the mentally afflicted, whatever? Even those who criticize the church most severely cannot definitively deny that their own compassion was not somehow shaped by a culture that has in part been shaped by a Christian heritage.

If he was getting bored, that correspondence must have reenergized him:”

“Jesus and I believe that it IS the church's supreme mission to end suffering in the here and now. You know better than I how many times Jesus condemned the hoarding of wealth and praised unquestioned giving. Remember the sheep and goats? All this speaks to our conduct now. The change in behavior will get us in the door later (and the saved-by-faith-alone crowd out on the curb)! ...

“The church need not apologize, except for any criminal activity ;-); and the lack of resolve, or ability, to do what it has clearly been told to do; and in sufficient numbers. It does have a finger in the dike though!”

And I replied:

“Jesus and you? Wow! I am silenced. Naah! ;)”

“On the other hand, Jesus did ask me to mention to you that while He commends you for your own compassion and your determination to call His church to more of the same, He wants to remind you that a "change in behavior" doesn't make a sinner a non-sinner against the standard of God's holiness. Hence, we're back to that whole grace thing insofar as a heavenly entry ticket is concerned.

“Now, when my pals and I use the term 'faith-only', we apply it to folks who take a saved card and treat good works as irrelevant. At no point in our little exchange have I so treated the importance of such works. They are the evidence of changed hearts. I have lamented along with you the lethargy and materialism of many who make up the visible church. I know there are many good fish and bad fish in the church (or tares growing alongside wheat - pick your parable) and that the Lord will make known His true church at the end of the age with no input from you or me ... In the goat-sheep scenario you cite, bear in mind that Jesus does not dismiss those on his left with the words, 'Sorry kids, your efforts were remiss and you don't quite measure up.' Rather, He says, 'I NEVER knew you.'

“You keep indicting the church universal as though it is a single entity with a single headquarters making policies. There is one group who tends to think in those terms, but I can never get the pope to respond to my emails. You might have better luck. For the rest of us, we are just individual communities of believers around the world who have to determine our own responses to the world's needs, usually as a vehicle to proclaiming the Gospel and advancing an eternal kingdom. You see, some of us really do believe that is our first priority, and though we cannot see all sides of reality simultaneously, we're pretty sure that Jesus at least appreciates that we struggle with what is the best way to manage our finite resources.

“I have confessed ... that the church often falls short of her potential. My question was *TO WHOM* she owes her apology. Marx himself? Who has done it in his name better, or on a larger scale, ever? In fact ... is someone else getting it done on a larger scale as we speak? Where has socialism ever worked on a scale grander than some small community, be a local church, a hippie commune or some cult's compound? ... I'm not a political animal, really ... Still, you poked fun at *a group* recently for pointing to totalitarian regimes that were not true communism ... They probably weren't, but they inevitably gained popularity by promising the moon before turning into the monsters they really were. Perhaps, those *folks* have the wisdom to recognize, historically, that the "socialist ideal" is a delightful utopian fantasy, but, in the real world, a practical oxymoron, because power would have to be vested in ideal people to work out an ideal system. Since, there are no ideal people, I retreat to my little community where together, we do the best we can to respond to a hurting world ...”

Eventually, we arrived at a point of mutual respect if not agreement. He wrote:

“If you are back safe from Boston, I suppose you know how a mountaineer feels after summiting Everest and making it down below the death zone!”

To which I replied:

“We stayed in an outlying town with my daughter and probably buzzed through Boston too quickly to risk infection.”

I did my duty. I defended us, you and me, as best I could. Is this fellow worth all that mental energy? Maybe, your time is too valuable to hear him. I don't mind if you lean toward my politics or his. What I hope you did not miss is that not everyone who questions the usefulness of the church in the world today is a rabid, slobbering, blaspheming, vitriolic adversary. I actually thought I detected in that dialogue evidence that my questioner pulls for the church to be the church as he understands it. There was a time when even people who would not step over the line into faith still held the community of believers, the church, in high regard. Speaking of the early church:

“They made the grace of God credible by a society of love and mutual care which astonished the pagans and was recognized as something entirely new. It lent persuasiveness to their claim that the new age had dawned in Christ.” - Michael Green

A paramedic was asked on a talk-show: “What was your most challenging 911 call?”
“Recently,” the paramedic began, “we got a call from that big white church on 11th and Walnut. A frantic usher was very concerned about an elderly man passed out in a pew who appeared to be dead. The usher could find no pulse and there was no noticeable breathing.”

The interviewer replied, “That was unusual and, no doubt, traumatic for that congregation, but how was it a particularly challenging call for a trained paramedic?”

Said the paramedic, “We carried out four guys before we found the dead one.”

No one ever cracked jokes about the lifelessness of the church in Jerusalem, but, sadly, they are quite easy to find today. Always on the lookout for the right program or gimmick, American churches swap members while most onlookers remain wholly unimpressed. The remedy is to understand the early church, not for the sake of reproducing ancient practices, but for its essence:

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. - Acts 2:42-47

Looking at that church, we see a people who stood out from other communities by the way they behaved toward each other with authentic brotherly love. They were serious about their purpose. Jesus was *Messiah*, and that news had to get out. His commands were to be obeyed. “Devoted” suggests a single-minded fidelity to the teaching of the Twelve, the stories that Peter, James, John and the others had lived out, stories that would become the four Gospels. This same kind of devotion was evident in the way they worshipped together. It was evident in the way they prayed together. It was evident in the way they remembered Christ together over broken bread.

God's power was seen in the signs and wonders that the Apostles performed, and this caused those outside the church to wonder at this group who had committed themselves to this teacher Jesus. The way these disciples acted toward each other caused others to desire to join them. The Lord added to their numbers and even those who watched from afar admired them.

The world today sees the church as powerless and irrelevant in our culture, and the reason is due in large part to our failure to live life differently than others around us. You have heard that the rate of premarital sex is about the same for church attending youth as non-attendees. The divorce rate is also comparable. But even if our morals are intact, don't just dismiss those like my friend who suspect that we may be more concerned about our lawns than the needs of the world around us, especially it is close to the truth. When we lose that distinctiveness so evident in Acts 2, all we are left with are words and church-growth schemes; poor substitutes for moral authority and divine power. When God "sets apart" a people, they had better look and act different than the world.

"We have forgotten we are God's people, and we have fallen into the worship of American gods. Now God's word to us is to return. Church historians may someday describe our period as the "American captivity of the church." It is no less real than the Babylonian Captivity in the history of Israel. Trapped in our false worship, we no longer experience the freedom that is our birthright in Jesus Christ. - Jim Wallis

It has not been my intent to break anything new to anyone, only to remind us of what we all know. We are God's people; here to fill a crucial role in the world, not through cleverly devised schemes of men to increase our camp, but through humble obedience to Jesus that we might be empowered by His Spirit's presence as we interact with a world to which we do not belong.

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Invitation (*Karl Crouch*)

Key of A

Shout to the Lord

My Jesus, my Saviour Lord, there is none like You; All of my days I want to praise the wonders of Your mighty love. My comfort, my shelter, tower of refuge and strength; Let ev'ry breath, all that I am, never cease to worship You.

Shout to the Lord, all the earth; Let us sing power and majesty, praise to the King. Mountains bow down and the seas will roar at the sound of Your name.

I sing for joy at the work of Your hands; Forever I'll love You, forever I'll stand. Nothing compares to the promise I have in You. **(repeat all)**

Communion Meditation (*Ken George*)

Lord's Supper (no music)

Offering Prayer (*Jim Ressler*)

Lively Offertory (*Kay Burrichter*)

Closing

Key of A

Shine, Jesus Shine

Shine, Jesus, shine, fill this land with the Father's glory; Blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire. Flow, river flow, flood the nations with grace and mercy. Send forth Your Word, Lord, and let there be light.