



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
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SEPTEMBER 27, 2015
THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Instruments of Praise I Peter 4:8-11; John 21:15-17

Jesus had a way of making the life of faith sound easy. “Feed my lambs . . . Tend my sheep . . . Feed my sheep.” “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. And love your neighbor as yourself.” “Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” The problem is that Jesus’ rather simplistic sounding directions for faithful living followed some rather challenging questions: “What do I have to do to inherit eternal life?” or “What is the greatest commandment?” or the one he asked Simon Peter three times after Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, with Peter’s triple denial clearly in mind: “Do you love me?”

Are you worn down and burdened by life’s challenges? Then come take my yoke, my harness, on you and we will bear life’s burdens together. Do you want to know the essence of faith? Simply love God with all that you are and have and love other people as much as you love yourself. Do you want to demonstrate your true love for me? Then love other people by meeting their needs. So simple sounding yet so completely demanding.

I have been privileged to study with astute theologians, people who have themselves studied and distilled the meaning of scripture and the teachings of Jesus. I have heard many wonderful preachers through the years and observed the ministry of effective and compassionate servants of God. I have studied scripture and read books and learned a great deal in the process. All of these opportunities have helped to shape and inform my ministry; however, some of the simplest and most memorable lessons of faith and ministry have come through people who have been given the gift of music to share God’s love.

To most of us, music appears as a gift that you either have or don’t have. I love music, but it is not my gift. For those who have it, however, it seems so easy. We listen to Mark play week by week and it appears effortless. We hear the choir sing, and the music flows through them like a stream dancing down a mountainside. We watch Amy conduct our choirs and

she looks like a magician merely conjuring surprises from thin air with the flick of a her wrist.

We know, of course, that good musicians study and practice hour after hour, day after day, and year after year. Music is a gift that cannot be neglected. It has to be exercised and polished constantly in order to be all that it is intended to be. I have learned from musicians that our gifts cannot be taken for granted and must be carefully attended to.

I have also learned that those gifts are not simply for our own enjoyment. Especially in ministry, our gifts are employed in the service of others. “Feed my sheep,” Jesus said. He did not say, “Prepare a feast for yourself and enjoy.” Ministry is in service to God and other people.

We often talk about worship being the most important thing we do as people of faith. It informs and influences everything else that we do. I cherish the words of the Westminster Catechism which remind us that “The primary purpose of humanity is to love serve God forever.” That is why we are here: to love and serve God. We serve God by serving one another.

No one knows this joyful task better than the musician. In a concert hall or on a stadium stage, the music may be about showcasing their talent, but in the sanctuary or wherever ministry occurs, it is all about meeting the needs of others through music. Ministry through music is a supporting role.

An organist such as Mark has the challenge of ministering in a variety of ways each Sunday. He has to choose music that will capture the theme and mood of worship. The hymns, which tell stories or proclaim great truths or evoke intense emotions, have to be studied and interpreted in appropriate ways. The musician serves the choir by playing at the correct speed with the appropriate volume in order to support their singing. Everything an organist does is in service to someone else, above all God.

I first learned this truth when I was seven or eight years old. Our children’s choir for an associational gathering of some sort. We were all nervous and a bit scared because we were in a different church among people we did not know. I remember our director telling us that we did not need to worry because Mrs. Whitesides would be playing the piano for us. She would cover everything. If we sang too fast, she would speed up. If we sang too slowly, she would reduce her pace. If we jumped ahead and skipped some lines, she would catch up. And if we got lost altogether, she

would find us and keep on playing. In other words, her job was to help us sing our song and do our very best.

Isn't that the purpose of ministry itself? Isn't that what Jesus calls us to do when he invites us to love God and our neighbor with everything we are? Isn't that what it means to feed his sheep?

The other day I read an article that included a quote from Stephen Colbert, the comedian who recently took over The Late Show from David Letterman. Mr. Colbert spoke at his alma mater, Northwestern University, for commencement in 2011. Listen to some of what he had to say about the art of improvisation:

After I graduated from here, I moved down to Chicago and did improv. Now there are very few rules to improvisation, but one of the things I was taught early on is that you are not the most important person in the scene. Everybody else is. And if they are the most important people in the scene, you will naturally pay attention to them and serve them. But the good news is you're in the scene too. So hopefully to them you're the most important person, and they will serve you. No one is leading, you're all following the follower, serving the servant. You cannot win improv.

And life is an improvisation. You have no idea what's going to happen next and you are mostly just making things up as you go along.

And like improv, you cannot win your life.

Even when it might look like you're winning. I have my own show, which I love doing. Full of very talented people ready to serve me. and it's great. But at my best, I am serving them just as hard, and together, we serve a common idea, in this case the character Stephen Colbert, who it's clear, isn't interested in serving anyone. And a sure sign that things are going well is when no one can really remember whose idea was whose, or who should get credit for what jokes.¹

¹Stephen Colbert, "Commencement Address, Northwestern University." (June 17, 2011,); available online at: <http://www.northwestern.edu/newscenter/stories/2011/06/colbert-speech-text.html#sthash.ynmnq823.dpuf>

Sacred music reminds us that our lives are lived in service to one another. We are not the most important person in the world or in the room—except to other people who are the most important people in the world and in the room. You know that the pipe organ is known by musicians (at least organists) as “the king of instruments” because its purpose is to imitate an entire orchestra. Yet, in worship, the purpose of even the “king of instruments” is to serve the King of kings.

Amy often reminds our choir—and me—that the best music is not necessarily technically perfect. The best music comes from the heart. You can tell which is which. Like music, our ministry to one another and to the world is best when it comes from the heart. “Do you love me?” Jesus asks. “Yes, Lord. You know I love you.” “Feed my sheep.”

We are grateful to Mark for all of these years of feeding us not only beautiful music, but music that has ministered to us in our highest and lowest moments and every moment in between. We are grateful for music that has inspired us, calmed us, challenged us, soothed us, and carried us out into the world to feed God’s sheep. Thanks be to God for the gift of ministry, for the gift of music, and for the gift of Mark Gansor. Amen.

September 27, 2015

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

When we stop and think about it, O God, your love is amazing. From the time we enter this world as tiny babes until the moment we draw our last breath and find ourselves in your arms, your love sustains us. In the holiest moments of life and in the lowest moments of life, it is your love which surrounds and supports us. In this moment and in every moment to follow, your love, O God, holds and astounds us . . . and we are grateful.

As a family of faith, we have needed to feel that love as grief has washed over us. Death, even when timely, has shepherded our friends away and we have been sad. At the same time, your love has manifest itself in the celebration of marriage and the gift of children. At every turn of our lives, you have been present for us, loving us as we needed, providing what we cannot do for ourselves, and enriching our lives beyond imagination.

Thank you, Lord, for every gift you bring our way for we know that all good things come from your hand. Thank you for tiny reminders of your grace and for bold evidence of your creativity. Thank you for loved ones who stand beside us and for loving ones who stand with us.

Today we offer a prayer of gratitude for Mark Gansor and all that he has meant to this congregation and our community for so long. Bless his gifts as they are offered in new ways. Use his talents to continue to display your wonder. And bless him and Anthony as new opportunities unfold for them. Wrap them in your grace and watch over them with your favor, we pray.

We all place our lives in your hands, O God, for there is no one else whom we can trust with life now and life eternal. Hold us gently, but firmly. Guide us carefully and in the right direction. Use us creatively and for your glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.