

First Presbyterian Church, Sylacauga, AL
The Rev. James B. Stanford
November 8, 2009

2 Chronicles 20
“Do You Get the Picture?”

My hope is that you read chapter 20 of the Old Testament book of 2 Chronicles before you came this morning ... or else that you will go and read it sometime this afternoon. You may have been able to decipher a little of the plot, as Hayden led us in the Call to Worship.

The situation is that King Jehoshaphat cries out to God, “O God, we have no power ... we do not know what to do!” Three nations have lined up as enemies against the tiny nation of Israel, and the king realizes that he is powerless without God’s help. This is very much the same way you and I feel today with so many things lining up against us.

Israel was in what appeared to be a hopeless situation. We read in verse 3 and 4 that “alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord,” and that “he proclaimed a fast for all ... and the people ... came together to seek help from the Lord.”

This king knew that if you want God’s help, you must confess your need. In verse 12 the king says to God: “We are powerless against the great multitude that is coming against us.” There are many times that I have looked up and confessed, “God, I feel incapable to do anything, but I know that You have all the resources that I need.”

Part of the solution is to get your eyes off the problem! Instead, your focus must be on God!

I haven’t counted, but I am told that chapter 20, verse 17 is the middle verse of the entire Old Testament. It has been called “a pregnant pause,” because God says: “The battle is not for you to fight!” King Jehoshaphat appoints those who could sing, and they began to sing and praise the Lord ... and in the meantime God sent an ambush and they won the battle.

For God’s people hymns and praise music is never just decorative or entertaining. It isn’t meant to be recreational or just something to fill the time. Rather, in worship our music and hymns and our praise are the clearest expressions of who we are and what we believe.

Music and singing are the gifts that God has given us to unite our heads and our hearts as we respond to God. The New Testament book of Colossians

speaks of the word of Christ dwelling in us richly as we sing our faith.
(Colossians 5:16)

There have probably been more conversions in choir lofts as in any other place ... more faith learned in a children's choir than in many a Sunday school class. In truth most of our theology is found in the hymnal. When we sing the faith, as we are doing today, the words of Christ are inscribed on our hearts.

Finally, in Revelation at the end of the Bible, as John parts the curtain to see into the future, we hear the sounds of heaven ... not the sounds of sermons (Thank God!) ... not the clamor of committee meetings (Thank God again!) ... but the sound that fills the heavens is that of those around God's throne singing. It is the sound that will ring for eternity.

In the hymn "What Wondrous Love Is This," the last verse says it best:
And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on.
And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on.
And when from death I'm free, I'll sing and joyful be.
And through eternity I'll sing on, I'll sing on.
And through eternity, I'll sing on!"

Resources

Fred Anderson, "A Faith That Sings," Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York, NY, April 18, 2004.

John M. Buchanan, "Saying Grace," Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago, IL, November 23, 2008.

Clayton A. Cobb, "A Hymn Homily," St. Peter's By the Sea Presbyterian Church, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA, April 11, 1999.

Stan Tolier, GOD HAS NEVER FAILED ME, BUT HE'S SURE SCARED ME TO DEATH A FEW TIMES, pages 17-27.