

American Guild of Organists
Central Texas Chapter
First Presbyterian Church
Waco, Texas
8NOV05
7:30pm

A Child on the Bench

Scripture Passage: Luke 9: 46-48

An argument arose among them as to which one of them was the greatest. (v.46). Have you ever heard of such a thing?

Let's pray:

Father, I pray that the words about to be spoken are, indeed, your words. Plant them in hearts as you will. It is our desire to give you our very best. In Jesus' name, Amen.

The Lord is with you

How does one stay humble when, with just one finger and the right registration, it is possible to depress one key and cause the whole room to vibrate? Further, is greatness not implied when a bench of our own awaits us, high and lifted up, while everyone else must sit, en masse, in common pews? Indeed, it is that special seat that I want us to consider tonight. With the attendant console and a bit of imagination, doesn't the organ bench resemble, even a little, a throne? And of the few who possess the skill and talent to sit there, some are more skillful than others; some are great. Who is the greatest? Even the most demure who would quickly say they are but amateurs would surely accept the title "Greatest" if it were thrust upon them.

Though I am not an organist, I am a musician, and based on my experience, concern over who among us is the greatest is part of the musician's environment. We're sophisticated about it all, of course; sophisticated to the point that our participation in the argument doesn't even have to be verbal. A small, understated smile means, that was good, I just don't want to say so. The raised eyebrow and pursed lips, with a slight tilt of the head means, I've heard better. We're genteel. But we're good at it. We know the meaning and the message of "polite applause." "Did you hear how she played that passage? It was as if she were wearing mittens." I exaggerate, but only a little.

We *should* be good at critiquing each other; our formal training hones our ear to find the foibles in *our* performances *and* in the performances of others, but that is no excuse.

The disciples were arguing about which one of *them* was the best. They were living in their own little world. By doing so, they discounted the contributions of other believers; they were, of course the best of the lot. But, Christ-following will not allow us to create and then choose to live in, our own little world. Though the organ in this place of worship accompanies the worship of this particular congregation, it is the ministry of the one who sits on that bench to open the ears and minds and hearts of this congregation to a world of Christian community and ministry much bigger than theirs. “Who among us is the best?” is the wrong question and it is too small a question. “Who among us is the best?” revealed that the disciples were not only self-centered, they were living in a kingdom much smaller than the one their Master was proclaiming.

With eyes and ears open to the breadth and depth of Jesus’ kingdom work, we are humbled to be a part of something that is far bigger than ourselves. It is by grace that we are invited into Christ’s story of redemption and equipped to make a contribution to the telling of it. Our giftedness is just that...gift.

The disciples had forgotten that it is a gift to be invited to follow Jesus and that it is a gift to be able to use our talents in Jesus’ kingdom work and that this whole thing is about Jesus, not us. The disciples were worrying about where their thrones might be positioned in relation to Jesus’ throne in the kingdom. Who would sit the closest to him? Who would be on the right, who on the left?

Jesus was aware of the inner thoughts of the disciples. Musical disciples, we must be aware that in our art, as with all art and artists, our inner thoughts are made known in the painting, the poem, or the performance. To counter their silly arguing and positioning, Jesus called a little child to come sit beside him...right beside him, in the very place the disciples hoped eventually to occupy. Any bench where Jesus sits becomes a throne, his throne, and it is a child and those whose hearts are child-like who are invited to sit beside him. How humbling to those whose energies and creativity are invested in the “who is greatest” game. The child who beams at the achievement of playing *chopsticks*, the child whose sticky fingers mar the keys, this is who Jesus says is the greatest...not the cleanest, not the most sophisticated, the child.

“Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me,” Jesus said. May I suggest that perhaps we are to find that trusting child within ourselves and welcome it, not necessarily the inner child of which the psychologist speaks, but the child-like spirit of humility, trust and wonder? Jesus calls his disciples to rediscover the child-like trust and joy within our hearts, to welcome its delight with *chopsticks*, welcome its wonder at getting to sit in such an important place and welcome its amazement at being invited to the

bench by Jesus. What wonder it would be to find out that Jesus not only knows chopsticks, but would delight in joining us in a duet that would redeem our version of *Heart and Soul*, a duet that would make us sound better than we are.

Oh, musical disciples, can you imagine with me what it would be like to approach our ministry, not as an audition for the “greatest among us” competition, but as a child on the bench, welcomed by Jesus, playing for him and with him...sticky fingers and all?

Jesus told his self-centered disciples that “the least among all of you is the greatest.” I can imagine a reverse stampede when Jesus said that; everyone rushing to be *obviously* the most humble, to be *proudly and hopefully* the least among them. How many times did Jesus shake his head and say, “They still don’t get it.”?

Actually, the scripture tells us in verse 49 that John’s response to Jesus’ gentle scolding was to change the subject, to something more sophisticated, more adult: “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not *follow with us*.” He’s not in our league.

We’re good at that too. Our subject changing is often along these lines: “We are only trying to create the very best art we can as a gift to God.” “What about being good stewards of our talent? Being involved in that kind of improvement might *look like* trying to be the best among us.”

Of course we should offer our best to God. Children *want* to do their very best, especially for their loving parents. Of course we should cultivate our talent. Children treasure the special gifts their parents give them, because of the love *behind* the gift.

But, try as we might to change the subject, the child is still sitting on the bench next to Jesus, wondering what in the world we are talking about. The good news is that Jesus continues to forgive our arguments and he continues to invite us to climb up onto his bench and sit beside him as a child...full of awe and wonder at the organ itself, but all the more that Jesus knows our name and our heart and, nonetheless, bids us come.

It is my prayer that every time you approach the console, it will be in response to, and with an awareness that the Master is inviting you to come, sit beside him as a child on the bench.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Terry W. York

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