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Monthly Newsletter of Hosanna Lutheran Church

June 2011

Not just Sunday people

A Few Words From Pastor John

God's Purpose for Hosanna...

For several months, the Mission Focus Team has been leading us in a visioning process that has been seeking to answer a question that will draw us into the future and guide us as a congregation. That question is: What is God's purpose for Hosanna?

One would think that it is really easy to answer this question and even ask another, like "Why does it take so long to answer a question that seems so easy to answer?" And that would be a good question but the "kicker" is that if there are 365 members in a congregation, each person would probably come up with a good answer in a brief period of time. The problem is, however, what is the one answer of the congregation as a whole?

I could easily answer the question, and it is straight out of Scripture, in both the Old and New Testaments: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and love your neighbor as yourself." To make it shorter so a 5 year old child could recite it, God's purpose for Hosanna could be: "Loving God and Loving Our Neighbor". Seems simple to me, so why not just go ahead with that one? Or how about the one Jean Waldo came up with in our visioning retreat which REALLY moved me, "Not just Sunday people"?

I hope by now you are beginning to see the point. I like mine, and I even like Jean's, but what is the answer that will move our entire congregation into God's future, stated in such a way that a 5 year old child could articulate and even get excited about? That purpose statement will take more time and effort from all of us.

So I invite you to be on the look-out for opportunities to gather with a small group to take part in this discerning process. We will be hosting several of these gatherings in the near future. You may get a personal invitation from someone hosting such a gathering in their home or you may see one of these opportunities in the bulletin or the monthly newsletter. Please make time to attend one of these gatherings and become involved with visioning for the future. A few of them have already taken place and those who have attended have been moved by the experience.

It is our hope that we will have this process completed by September, then the next step will be to create some "guiding principles" or "core values" which support our purpose statement. During this time, I also invite each of us to pray, pray, pray...that God would guide us and grant us the wisdom

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Hosanna Lutheran Church

and passion to move into the future that God has in store for Hosanna Lutheran Church in this time and this place!

Thanks. Pastor John

From Dale Bargmann

Hosanna Communications

The June calendar is not as packed as April and May, but there still are some important things taking place.

- Saturday, June 11 is another service opportunity -- preparing lunches for Habitat for Humanity volunteers.
- On Sunday June 12, everyone is asked to wear red as we celebrate Pentecost, the church's birthday bash. It also is the day our elementary-age kids head to Lutherhill for their week-long camp, also of our next Blood Drive (scroll down for more information).
- Sunday, June 19 is Father's Day; Confirmation camp begins at Lutherhill and... there's our Mission of the Month Noisy Offering which supports NAM's SOS (Survival Over the Summer) Food Drive. The numbers needing assistance are greater this year than last, so be generous.

Here's all the June highlights:

Sunday, June 5

- **Equal Exchange Coffee Sunday**
- **11:30 AM - Church Council Meeting**

Monday, June 6

- **7:00 PM - Care Team Meeting**

Wednesday, June 8

- **1:00 PM - Piano Guild Recitals (through June 11)**

Saturday, June 11

- **9:00 AM - Habitat for Humanity Lunch (Council)**

Sunday, June 12

- **Day of Pentecost**
- **Blood Drive**
- **Elementary Camp at Lutherhill (through June 17)**

Sunday, June 19

- **Confirmation Camp at Lutherhill (through June 24)**
- **Father's Day**
- **Mission of the Month Noisy Offering: NAM SOS Food Drive**

Here's more information from Bernie Brown on the June 12th Blood Drive:

The Blood Center has given us 4 slots at our 6/12 blood drive for

automated donations (9:00, 10:00, 11:00 and 12:00). You will have the opportunity to donate double red blood cells or plasma. Each of these takes approximately 30-60 minutes. Information about each of these important procedures is posted below. You will still have the option of donation whole blood if you do not wish to do an automated donation.

Donating Plasma

Plasma is the liquid portion of blood. It transports red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets, which control bleeding, fight infection and provide nutrients. Burn and trauma patients frequently are given plasma transfusions to replace fluid loss. Someone who receives many red cell transfusions may require plasma as well to maintain blood clotting.

Plasma is also transfused to some patients with inherited or other kinds of bleeding or clotting disorders. Plasma can be stored for up to one year after donation.

After donating plasma, you may give plasma again after 28 days, whole blood after one month or platelets after 72 hours.

Donating Double Red Cells

You can give two units of red blood cells with no side effects other than feeling twice as good about saving lives. Red blood cells are the most-used blood component for surgery, trauma and treatment of blood disorders.

When an individual donates whole blood, The Blood Center separates a single unit of red blood cells using manual procedures in the laboratory. Now, new technologies allow for the collection of two units of red cells from a single donation through a process known as double red cell apheresis. The special advantage of the procedure is that you are able to give two units of red blood cells without any ill effects.

You may donate double red cells again or whole blood after 112 days (16 weeks).

Special requirements for donating double red cells:

- Males: Minimum 130 pounds and 5'1" in height
- Females: Minimum 150 pounds and 5'5" in height
- Iron Level: For both men and women - 40 percent or 13.3 hemoglobin.

Hosanna Book Discussion

We will have our next book discussion on Saturday, June 4, at 6:00 PM in the Hosanna Conference Room.

The topic will be **"In the Sanctuary of Outcasts: a Memoir" by Neil White.**

White tells an emotional, incredible true story of crime, redemption, and spirituality, as he discovers happiness and fulfillment in an unlikely place-while he is imprisoned in The Long Center, the last leper colony in the U.S.

Those who wish can adjourn to a local restaurant after the meeting to continue the discussion.

Contact Nancy Agafitei (713-419-0465 or nancy.agafitei@hcpl.net) for more information.

June Seniors Outing

There is no Seniors Outing in June. The next gathering of 50-plusers will be Tuesday, July 12. We will meet at the Hosanna Cinema for a movie.

The Disciple Project

June 26-30, 2011 at Texas Lutheran University, Seguin, TX

A cross-cultural, cross-generational Leadership School for people in 8th grade through adults.

Cost: \$375 per person (includes meals, housing and all programming).
Deadline to register online is Tuesday, May 31, 2011.

For the last eight seasons, over 10 years, the TX-LA Gulf Coast Synod has hosted **The Disciple Project** for the purpose of Christian Leadership.

The Vision: A diverse community of youth and adults learning Christian leadership together to live lives of Christian discipleship.

The Mission: To identify, equip and send youth and adults as Christian leaders into the world.

We will do this by providing a time and place to:

- **Experience an inclusive, outwardly focused Christian Community**
- **Learn and practice leadership skills**
- **Discern God's Call**
- **Live in response to God's grace**

One of the most effective components of The Disciple Project is the wide variety of Learning Tracks developed each year. The goal is leadership through discipleship by connecting to passions, gifts, skills and daily life. Tracks target specific audiences, engage a variety of ages and have different outcomes that get carried home with each participant. We know The Disciple Project is effective. Stories abound of leaders returning to their congregation with real skills and a renewed sense of call to serve. More importantly, we see leaders of all ages using new skills integrated into their life following this experience.

Adults attending The Disciple Project are amazed at the gifts and leadership capacity of their young people. They learn side by side, and through the course of the week, mentor one another. This is not a leadership school for volunteering at the church or a chance for youth to be a better youth group leader. The Disciple Project is about faithful leadership and service in daily life.

[Learn more and register](#)

Family Life Update - June

Summer Camps at Lutherhill

- June 12 - Elementary age campers
- June 19 - Confirmation

Kids Church

- June 5, 12 and 26
- June 19 (No KC; Worship and Mentor Sunday)

Lutherhill Day Camp Coming to Hosanna

Love Wins



Who: Children completing grades K - 5th

What: Day Camp is 5 days of Games, Bible Study, Arts & Crafts, Friends, Worship, Fun, Snacks, Songs, and More!

When: Monday thru Friday, July 25-29
8 AM to 3 PM with before/after care available.

How Much: \$100 per Child (before/after care additional charge)
(Price includes staff, program and supplies for the week plus a souvenir camp cup.)

[Print registration form \(one per child\)](#)

Note: We are looking for volunteers to cook lunches and for before/after-care. Please see Amber if you are willing to cook one meal or help with before/after care time.

June Mission of the Month "Noisy Offering"

Sunday, June 19 - NAM SOS Food Drive

Summer will be here before we know it, and Northwest Assistance Ministries (NAM) is working now to stock up its food pantry shelves so that children home for summer vacation are well taken care of.

Typically there is a 30 percent increase in demand on NAM's food pantry during the summer months. According to information released by NAM, each summer the food pantry feeds more than 5,000 area children through its Survival over the Summer (SOS) project. NAM relies heavily on individuals, groups, schools, businesses and congregations to conduct food drives and fundraisers to make it a success.

SOS is designed to help families whose children receive free or reduced-price meals during the school year," said Carole Little, NAM's President and CEO. When school isn't in session, many of these children go without nutritious meals. Through SOS we try to provide these families with additional food so they can stretch their limited budgets to cover other summer expenses, such as higher electric bills."



Residents typically remember to donate food to the less fortunate during the holiday season - a time where merrymaking is generally gathered around a meal.

However, some individuals tend to forget that while they're off making summer plans others are less worried about a vacation and more concerned with obtaining their next meal.

"We know about the hunger issue around the world but we need to also know it is in the community," Robin Charlesworth, president of the Rotary Club of Houston Northwest Sunset.

Make some noise. Make a difference in the world.

Debunking the Rapture

Video Interview with Barbara Rossing

New Testament scholar Barbara Rossing, Professor of New Testament at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, describes the background and fallacy of the so-called "rapture."



Lump

"A lot of us have done things in our lives we are ashamed of."

A video by Rob Bell



Christ Alone

By Paul Lutter

The scene depicted in the painting has Martin Luther standing in the pulpit, with one finger pointing to the Bible before him and another finger outstretched before him. In the middle of the painting is Jesus Christ who is hanging on the cross and adorned in white.

Hanging in St. Mary's Church in Wittenberg, a painting by Lucas Cranach the Elder.

Under-girding the other paintings on the altarpiece that represent core Reformation theological teaching, the very location of this painting at the base of the altarpiece proclaims something central.

The foundation



Jesus Christ alone is the very foundation of the Reformation -- and life itself. Jesus Christ alone is the only hope people have, both then and now.

The truth of this good news is found in the ways people have been challenged by it, not only in the time of the Reformation but also well before and after it, even in the time and place in which we now live.

Some are challenged by the good news that it is Jesus Christ alone who is our only hope and salvation precisely because it seems so singular in its exclusivity.

"Sure," some might say, "Jesus Christ is our salvation. Jesus Christ is our hope. But our only salvation and our only hope?" Questions like this come on the heels of postmodern suspicion of anything that looks like a foundation upon which to stand or live. Still others raise questions like this precisely because this confession challenges what we know through other fields of inquiry such as the natural sciences.

Still others raise questions such as this at another level. The question of whether Jesus Christ alone can be our hope and salvation comes because of a fear that Jesus Christ alone might not be enough for us.

This is one of the real problems people have with the confession of Jesus Christ alone as our sole source of hope and salvation: Will Jesus Christ save us? Will Jesus Christ be our hope? Will Christ make room enough for us and for those for whom we care?

Exclusive and inclusive

Another problem people have with the confession of Jesus Christ alone is this: What of those who do not believe in Jesus Christ alone? Will they be cast into hell? What of those who are good people, but still don't believe that Christ alone is their hope and salvation? Is all hope and salvation lost for them?

These are vexing and persistent questions. At one level or another, these questions raise just how exclusive "Christ alone" is on the one hand, and how inclusive "Christ alone" is on the other. Some grow nervous at the very questions, because to answer them, they fear, might either alienate or tread on the border of heresy.

These questions are neither philosophical nor hypothetical. These questions come from people who know the weight of sin and suffering, death and separation, despair and hopelessness.

These questions call on us to do something more than speculate. They call on us to proclaim the hope that is within us. These questions call on us to proclaim the radical exclusivity and inclusivity of Christ alone who is for and with us.

It is Jesus Christ alone who dies and is raised from death for our sake. In his crucifixion, Christ destroys and thus excludes the ultimate power of sin, death and the devil himself on us.

In his resurrection, Christ excludes the need for us to see salvation as a self-help program, as something we need to help out with at any level. In and for the sake of Jesus Christ alone, salvation is a gift given freely and fully to and for you.

Radically inclusive

Through his death and resurrection for our sake, the confession of Jesus Christ alone is also radically inclusive. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 8, "nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ."

This "nothing" is actually something in which we can take refuge and rest. Since Jesus Christ loves sinners, Christ does not separate himself from us, but finds every way he can think of to come among us.

Where human promises of love and fidelity fail, Christ is steadfast and true, even to those who have no right to claim Christ as their own because the weight of their sin is so great. Jesus Christ alone does not and will not give up on us. His descent into hell itself for our sake is proof enough. We are his, and he is ours.

Jesus Christ alone is enough for us -- and then some!

Paul Lutter is a visiting instructor at Gustavus Adolphus College. He is working toward his Ph.D. from Luther Seminary.

Thanks to Grace, We Are All "A" Students

By Brian Beckstrom

I just finished teaching my first college course. Overall it was a great experience. The students were engaged, the topic was interesting, and I discovered that I really enjoy teaching.

The only difficult thing about the experience was having to give out grades. I found it strange to be in a position where my decisions were causing students anxiety.

Usually I'm on the other end of that experience, reminding students that grades measure their work in a particular course, not their self worth or identity.

Feeling like an impostor

Most of our students at Wartburg are high achievers who've always done well in school.

They did well academically in high school, were successful athletes and musicians and held many leadership positions. In other words, they are used to being recognized for their achievements. And without realizing it, their achievements often become their identities.

They don't know who they are when they're not the best.

Years ago I heard Rolf Jacobson, a professor at Luther Seminary, talk about the doubt that often accompanies students when they get to college.

Suddenly these bright young people find themselves in an environment where nearly everyone has similar abilities and accomplishments. When students get into this situation they often fall prey to a psychological phenomenon known as "the impostor syndrome."

They look around at their seemingly perfect classmates and begin to despair that someone made a mistake - they don't belong here.

Often students begin to think that they are "impostors" and that it's only a matter of time until others figure out that they don't belong.

I've seen this scenario play out numerous times, particularly during fall semester of the freshman year.

Seemingly self-confident students come into our offices, but as soon as the door closes the reality sneaks out. They're scared to death.

Scared that they're not good enough, smart enough or talented enough to make it in college.

The irony is that the "perfect" classmate, with whom they feel so insignificant in comparison, will probably be in the next day admitting the same fear.

And so I watch them walk around campus putting on a mask of confidence while suffering inside, unconvinced that anyone knows how they feel.

My message to these students is simple: Remember who you are.

Remember that you're still the same talented child of God that you have always been.

Your job isn't to achieve recognition but to be the person God created you to be. No one can take away your identity. It isn't dependent on anything external but rather in the person God created you to be.

God doesn't give grades

Our culture may be obsessed with external evaluation and competition, but God isn't. And the fact that God doesn't evaluate us according to our grades, accomplishments or looks frees us to do something truly radical.

It allows us to refuse to play the game of position and prestige, because our self worth is tied to what God has done, not what others see in us.

The end result of finding our identity in God's act of creation is freedom.

Freedom to be who we are -- imperfect human beings who are loved by God regardless of what our grades or accomplishments might say about us.

We have the freedom to say no to forces that seek to define us by what we do instead of who we are. We have the freedom to be loved unconditionally.

As the Apostle Paul so helpfully reminds us in his letter to the Galatians, "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1).

And whenever we forget or wonder if this freedom is real, we can look once again at the nail-pierced hands of our Savior, who gave his all so that we might live in freedom.

Brian Beckstrom is campus pastor at Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa

Let Your Prayers Rise Like Incense

By Megan Rohrer

As an ELCA pastor, you'd think I'd feel more comfortable praying in public. But I confess that nearly every time I pray in public, I feel self-conscious, like my words weren't moving, poetic or spirit-filled enough.

Because it's my job, I can't refuse to pray during worship or when someone in tears pleads for private prayer. Thankfully, I'm required to practice praying out loud.

I've found it helpful to read the Psalms, which show me that prayer can be an expression of awe for God and the wonders of the earth, confusion about injustice in the world, cries for help and healing or even anger at God, when God seems to have forgotten to be as present as is promised.

I've also found it helpful to memorize some of the beautiful prayers that almost always touch people's hearts. Words like: "Now I lay me down to sleep," "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want," "God grant me the serenity" and "Our Father, who art in heaven." Recently, I've enjoyed using hymns and spirituals as prayers and find that they touch my heart in a particularly moving way. Some of my favorites to sing are: "Jesus loves me this I know," "Amazing Grace," and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot."

Today is the National Day of Prayer. The theme is the title of Martin Luther's famed hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

This got me thinking about the way we pray privately and publicly. Whether it is through words, meditation, dance, enjoying nature, writing or singing, I hope your prayers will rise like incense.

As ELCA members we have many prayers that come from our core, our hearts and our tradition that the nation desperately needs. Here is my prayer for today:

God of justice, teach us to be better at praying for our enemies, loving our neighbor and giving others the same freedom to "sin boldly" that we enjoy.

Help bring your justice in a palatable way, so that we don't feel like we need to take up arms in order to bring peace.

God of healing and health, help us to live lives free of pain and suffering. Grant us the ability to function as fully as we are able and give us the desire to ask for help when we need it.

Bring peace and comfort to those who become weaker each day, who live with a diagnosis or looming death.

Bless the hands and hearts of all who tend to the sick, that they may have compassion and that they will be able to see signs of life that help them not to be overcome with grief or loss.

God who is the Monarch of Monarchs, President of Presidents and Boss of all Bosses, help us to lead and follow with respect and to enable all to live life freely.

Grant those in positions of political power the wisdom to serve with humble hearts and minds to figure out difficult budgeting, so that the poor and vulnerable are not left without the services they desperately need.

God who is found in the poor, the hungry, the naked and imprisoned, be with all who have less than they need.

Help us to be generous people with creative minds able to help when we can.

Take the scales from our eyes that prevent us from seeing and responding to the needs of those who cry desperately for the help that only we can provide.

Thank you God, most of all, for loving us, naming us, claiming us, and despite all you know about our deepest natures declaring us your children.

Amen.

Megan M. Rohrer is an ELCA pastor called by five congregations, who has served as a missionary to the homeless in San Francisco since 2002.

Visitor from Wibaux

By John Keller

Yesterday after worship, I met Wayne, a visitor from Rochester, N.Y. He was here in Minnesota on a business trip and decided to worship at Resurrection. We had a pleasant conversation around visiting churches. After our conversation, I observed others conversing with him. Hospitality was being practiced.

Wayne's visit reminded me of my first week at my previous church. My first Sunday morning was a bit overwhelming.

Like Resurrection, it was a growing congregation, and being the new staff person, every face and name was new to me.

A primary part of my job was to follow-up with visitors via letter and phone calls. On Monday morning, as I looked through the small stack of visitor cards, one card stood out: a visitor from Wibaux, Mont. Pierre Wibaux, the town's namesake.

Wibaux is a tiny town on the eastern edge of Montana. Wibaux has no distinction, other than it was where my father grew up in the 1920s and 1930s.

My grandfather had been the county doctor. Though the area has hit hard times in recent years, my father always spoke with great fondness for this high-plains town.

When I saw the Wibaux welcome card, I wrote a special letter of welcome with a note asking if the visitor knew of my grandfather or father.

She wrote me back a short note, saying that yes, she had known my grandfather. In fact, he had assisted in the delivery of her children years ago. She also wrote how she appreciated the visit to the church and the hospitality.

Her kind letter gave me some much-needed affirmation during a stressful transition.

In Genesis 18, Abraham is sitting by his tent when he spots three visitors approaching.

He immediately offers hospitality to the visitors, providing a special meal for them. Soon he discovers that his guests are angelic visitors from God, who bring the promise of a son for Abraham and Sarah.

Hospitality has always been a hallmark of God's people that brings blessings to both the giver and recipient.

How have you practiced hospitality recently? When have you received hospitality from others?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, may I practice mercy and kindness toward the stranger in your name.

The Visual Arts in Worship

Have you gazed at the sky lately? Have you noticed the amazing colors and dazzling hues of an evening sunset? Have you ever been mesmerized by a gigantic rainbow with its backdrop of smoldering gray rain clouds? What variety our God gives us! What incredible creativity those heavens demonstrate! It's as though every day presents a brand new canvas, and our awesome Creator graciously paints for us a new and original design from His endless palate of purples, reds and blues.

Mandate

If one has ever questioned the authenticity of visual art as a part of worship, all he or she needs to do is consider the priority our Lord placed on the ascetically beautiful when making this world. God's creation is nothing less than awe-inspiring.

Clearly, God's creative handiwork is intentional. God purposefully made what we see around and above us to be more than just functional. All of nature was designed so that it would point us back to God. No doubt that is what the shepherd boy, David, realized as he lay on a hillside night after night staring up at the stars. David recognized the profound purpose of those twinkling lights shining down on him. What he saw inspired him to

worship. That is why he opened the 19th Psalm with these words: "The heavens declare the glory of God."

God's priority on the visual is not just evident in creation. Certain worship encounters in God's Word also had stunning visual effects. For example, consider what Isaiah saw in that service that led to his calling and commissioning in Isaiah 6. First, Isaiah saw the Lord. Had he not been given the opportunity in that vision to see the Lord, he would not have known that the Lord was high and lifted up or that the train of His robe filled the temple. Had he not seen the seraphim, Isaiah would not have known what those majestic creatures looked like or even what they did. Furthermore, Isaiah would not have realized the significance of the coal that touched his lips because he would not have seen one of the seraphim take the coal from the altar. The Lord not only allowed Isaiah to hear this life-changing service. The Lord knew Isaiah needed to see the visual elements in the service in order to fully experience that worship time and be moved by it.

Think, now, about the service in Revelation 4 and 5. Think through John's description of that great, yet-to-be, worship gathering in heaven. The aspects of that service which were most significant and impacting were not those which John heard, but rather those that John saw. John saw the occupied throne in heaven. He saw the elders and the living creatures. Most importantly, John saw the Lamb of God, looking as if He had been slain. John was drawn into that unfathomable moment, and he was brought to his knees in worship, because of what he was privileged to see. This is the powerful effect "visual art," if you will, can have on our senses and on our souls.

Motivation

While the Bible and nature both seem to strongly advocate visual arts which glorify God, perhaps our greatest reason to utilize visual and multi-sensory arts in corporate worship are people. Reaching those earthly creatures Jesus died for should motivate us to use whatever means we can to encourage them toward true, Biblical worship.

We know that people without Christ can be drawn to Him through seeing His attributes in nature. In fact, Romans 1:20 says they are "without excuse." Those of us who know Christ may still at times need multi-sensory help as well, even among Jesus' own disciples. Thomas, when he was told Jesus had arisen from the dead, said, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print...I will not believe." (John 20:25 NKV) Rather than ignoring Thomas' need, Jesus invited Thomas to place his finger in His wounds and look at His hands. Truly, God has gone to much effort to visually show people how much He loves them and seeks after them. We, His representatives, should do no less...

Ted Smith was Billy Graham's pianist for many years. In regard to the priority on the people we are trying to reach, he said, "For 47 years our stage at our crusades had the same things: blue bunting, flowers, a piano and an organ. We realized one day we had to change the look and design of our stage to appeal to younger generations."

Our "younger generations" are a part of a new culture called "postmodernism." These students and young adults have grown up with video games, text messaging and MTV. They take in and process information differently and often respond especially well to visual images

and illustrations. Leonard Sweet uses the acronym EPIC to describe postmodern worship: Experiential, Participatory, Image-driven, and Connected.¹

Michael Adler, the Worship and Arts Pastor at Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, shared his convictions about becoming more relevant to our culture: "We have a stewardship to all the senses for about 90 minutes on Sunday mornings," Michael said. "Everyone learns in a different way. I am constantly asking myself, 'What do we need to do to wake up the guy in the third row?'"

Means

The Apostle Paul was desperate to reach others for Christ. And he was willing to step out of his comfort zones and meet them where they were. He wrote, "To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." (1 Corinthians 9:22 NIV)

In regard to visual arts in worship, what are some of the "means," as Paul put it, through which we "might save some"?

Visual arts by the strictest definition includes two-dimensional art, such as painting, photography, computer art and three-dimensional art, including sculpture, installation art or an architectural space. A third kind of visual art is kinetic art, such as cinematography or video art. However, for the purposes of this article we are also including performance arts like drama and dance as well as other primarily visual elements that are designed to enhance the corporate worship experience.

Some of the creative approaches that churches are pioneering now are rather astounding. For years, churches have used living Christmas trees and Easter dramas to relate and drive home the hope of Christ during certain holidays. However, in recent days, other kinds of visual effects are being used to make an impact, not just in special events, but during "regular" week-to-week services.

For example, Bell Shoals Baptist Church in Brandon, FL has theme-driven services. As their worship pastor, Simeon Nix, explained that they often illustrate each of the pastor's sermon points with supporting "B-roll" video footage. Rather than simply showing the static text of his points on the screens, this background video runs for a minute or so as the pastor comes to each point. Michael Adler of Shades Mountain Baptist said they use ballet dancers at times to illustrate the beauty and message of a song. On other occasions, they use "prop art," as he called it. Simple props are set on the stage or held by mimes to enhance certain songs. Sometimes props that illustrate that day's theme will change throughout the entire service.

The idea list for using visual art in worship is practically limitless. And the importance of such art cannot be overstated. More and more churches are prioritizing visual and multi-sensory art in their gathering times. In fact, some of the larger churches, like James River Assembly in Springfield, Missouri, have entire departments devoted to the creative arts!

Of course, if you work in a small church like I do, then your budget probably won't allow you to have your own creative arts staff members. A new church plant in Hoover, Alabama called The Church at Ross Station,

has only about 100 members at this time. Because of limited resources and borrowed meeting space (a school gymnasium) they don't try to bring visual art into every service. They try to provide unusual and creative elements about once a month, rather than weekly. Once every four to five weeks is enough to keep services fresh and varied. Their creative arts team is made up of the pastor, members of the praise team and a couple other volunteers. The pastor, Randy Norris, gives them his general message themes at least two to three months in advance. This allows them time to brainstorm on great ideas and have time to prepare the best presentations possible.

The Church at Ross often downloads videos and other visual resources from the web. For churches that don't have their own video production and creative arts staff, these sites are an incredible asset. They include <http://www.sermonspice.com>, <http://www.bluefishtv.com>, and www.Willowcreek.com/willowdrama.

Message

It needs to be clearly stated that visual arts should never take the place of the spoken word in our worship gatherings. Paul's words in Romans 10:14 still ring true: "...how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (NIV)

Visual arts certainly can present a message in text on the screen or on poster board. Nonetheless, most often such art is best utilized to support and enhance the message. Visual effects inspire and intrigue people and help open their hearts so they will listen to what God wants to speak to them. Multi-sensory elements can even help "close the deal" and bring people to greater faith in Christ, as we saw with the "doubting" disciple, Thomas.

Most importantly, any creativity within our worship services must be Spirit-initiated and Spirit-led. Only God knows exactly who will be in those services, and only He knows what they need to see in order to reach them. After all, He is the Creator through us. And when He creates visual art through us, art that He can use for His glory - whether it's a beautiful painting or a poignant video - such art will never be a bad thing that we, His church, should avoid. Rather, it is a holy thing we should embrace...

Bible Boot Camp 7

"There's a naked man outside!"

The Wednesday morning (10 AM) Bible Study participants have chosen to study of the Old Testament book of Isaiah. Recently, Pastor John challenged the group: "Suppose that government authorities had decided to seize all Bibles and you were forced to memorize three books, what would they be?"

The books receiving the most votes were: Romans, John, Luke, Psalms, Acts and Isaiah. When asked which of these the regular participants would like dive into upon completion of the present study. several indicated a preference for something from the Old Testament. Isaiah, with all its Messianic references, was the unanimous choice. So, here's some background, both for those able to attend the Wednesday morning sessions, and for those on the Hosanna email list who would like to study/read this important book on their own.

The book of Isaiah is history, prophecy and even a parable ([chapter 5](#)). It is the first of the books in that part of the Old Testament called Major Prophets (because of the large amount of material they contain, not because of the importance of their message). The purpose of the book was to call the Southern Kingdom of Judah back to faithfulness with God and announce the coming of the Messiah.

Chapters 1-39 point out the sins of both the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah, then declare severe punishment to them and all neighboring nations:

"Wash yourselves and be clean! Get your sins out of my sight. Give up your evil ways." (Isaiah 1:16)

Isaiah also proclaims great hope:

"Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us')", a passage fulfilled in Matthew 1:23-24, "Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'"

Chapters 4-55 tell of the return and restoration after the Babylonian exile. He repeats the phrase "There is no God beside me." There also is another foretelling of the Messiah, who will bring new life through his death:

"He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet he never said a word. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth." (Isaiah 53:7)

Isaiah, The Prophet

Isaiah, the son of Amoz, prophesied from roughly 740 to 700 BC -- about 60 years -- during the reigns of kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Isaiah's mastery of language, his rich and vast vocabulary, and his poetic skill have earned him the title, "Shakespeare of the Bible." He wrote during a time of upheaval a general unrest. Israel and Judah allied with pagan neighbors and warred against each other. The Assyrian Empire (in modern Iraq), the major superpower of the day, was expanding and the Northern Kingdom of Israel faced decline and imminent disaster. The Southern Kingdom of Judah was also vulnerable, thought its destruction ultimately came at the hands of a later power, Babylon.

Sources tell us that Isaiah was the cousin of King Uzziah, suggesting he was of a family of high rank. He had easy access to the court and Temple in Jerusalem (Isaiah 7:3; 8:2), but, his status didn't prevent him from speaking for the common people, who were being victimized by the rampant corruption of the ruling class:

"What makes you think I want all your sacrifices?" says the Lord. "I am sick of your burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fattened cattle. I get no pleasure from the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to worship me, who asked you to parade through my courts with all your ceremony? Stop bringing me your meaningless gifts; the incense of your offerings disgusts me ... Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows" (Isaiah 1:11-17).

Isaiah's personal life was a reflection of his religious calling as prophet. He was married to a woman referred to as "the prophetess" and he had two sons who bore symbolic names given by God -- Shearjashub ("Remnant will return") and Mahershalalhashbaz ("Destruction is imminent"). These sons assisted their father in his ministry and may have carried on his tradition after his death.

Isaiah warned strongly against alliances with pagan nations, believing that Israel and Judah should rely only on God's power, not treaties with surrounding countries. To dramatize the futility of Judah allying itself with Egypt against Assyria, **Isaiah attempted to turn public opinion by stripping and walking naked and barefoot for three years**, declaring:

"So the king of Assyria will lead away stripped and barefoot the Egyptian captives and Cushite* exiles, young and old, with buttocks bared to Egypt's shame. Those who trusted in Cush and boasted in Egypt will be dismayed and put to shame" (Isaiah 20:4-5).

Isaiah witnessed the conquest of the Northern Kingdom of Israel beginning under Tiglath Pileser (745-726 BC) and ending with the fall of Samaria, capital of the Israel (721/722 BC), with subsequent deportations by later Assyrian kings, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal.

Isaiah's most dramatic success came during the reign of King Hezekiah of

Judah. When Sennacherib of Assyria laid siege to the major Judean city of Lachish and his armies threatened Jerusalem, Isaiah counseled Hezekiah not to capitulate:

"This is what the Lord says concerning the king of Assyria: He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here. He will not come before it with shield or build a siege ramp against it. By the way that he came he will return; he will not enter this city, declares the Lord" (Isaiah. 37:32-34).



A story preserved in Isaiah 37 (as well as 2 Kings 19 and 2 Chronicles 32) relates that an angel of the Lord forced the Assyrian army to withdraw from Jerusalem. However, Hezekiah, in an effort to assuage Assyria, apologized to its King, Sennacherib, and sent him a large bribe. Soon after, Hezekiah fell ill, and Isaiah foretold his imminent death (Isaiah 38). Hezekiah prayed desperately to God for deliverance. Isaiah declared that God added 15 years to Hezekiah's life.

Isaiah's fate is unknown. Tradition states that after Hezekiah's death, Isaiah was killed by Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, who reversed the religious reforms of his father and considered Isaiah a thorn in his side.

In 612 BC, during the reign of Josiah, the Assyrian capital of Nineveh, was destroyed by the Babylonians. The Assyrian empire came to an abrupt end.

Judah existed until 586 BC when it was conquered by the Babylonians under Nebuzaradan, captain of King Nebuchadnezzar's bodyguard. Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed and most of the people were forcibly removed to Babylon.

**Cush or Kush: Now the Republic of Sudan; referred to as Nubia, and as "Ethiopia" in ancient Greek and Greco-Roman records.*

Some things to think about

- As you anticipate the future, are you more of a dreamer or a realist?
- Isaiah 5 notes several social problems: oppression of the poor, disrespect for God, legalized injustice and self-centered leadership. How are these reflected in your newspaper this week?
- When you begin a project with high hopes but it fails to meet expectations, do you give up? Try again? Wait until another time? Why?
- What situation are you now facing that scares you?
- On a scale of 1 - 10, how much trust do you have in God during scary times?
- When have you thought something would work out in your favor, but it didn't?
- What is one example of an injustice or neglect of the poor in your community or nation that you could work on correcting? Tax reform? Housing? Health care? Race relations? Abuse? Homelessness? Something else? What is stopping you?
- Have you ever been asked to side with someone else in a dispute or mutual protection? If you said yes, how did it turn out?
- Do you learn more through listening to lectures, or by object lessons? Why? Cite an example.
- "Do not fear for I am with you. Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Surely I will help you. Surely I will uphold you with my righteous hand." (Isaiah 41:10, 14). How does this passage make you feel?
- Sometimes it seems people will turn anywhere except to God and the Bible. They try eastern religion, horoscopes, they incorporate practices from pagan religions, or they replace God with idols of materialism, prosperity, work, education, possessions, family, sports -- the list is endless. What do you spend most of your time thinking about and talking about? That is an indication of where your heart lies and what is most important to you.

[Click here for more background on Isaiah, including archaeology, key passages in Isaiah, a reading selection, photos and a Kid's Page.](#)

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