

Teaching for 12-17-08

Playing in the Orchestra

Two weeks ago we looked a question regarding all our many activities, *To What End?* This week, is a follow up to that with somewhat of a parable of sorts. Last Saturday evening we were able to attend the Michael W. Smith concert at the Xcel Energy Center. What was interesting was to watch the orchestra. At any one time, there were some that were playing, and some who were not. Oddly enough, the people who were not playing did not seem upset, or jealous of those who were playing at that time. And they all had their attention riveted between the conductor and their own particular music stand. The orchestra is a great illustration of how we need to learn to work together for the sake of the Kingdom in our cities. Give it some thought.

Dan is a trumpet player. He loves to play the trumpet. He has been playing the trumpet since he was a boy. He actually feels that he has been called to play the trumpet. Over the years of playing and practice, he has learned to appreciate, no love, the particular style of music that his trumpet makes. There is a certain personality to the trumpet that he loves and wishes that others would appreciate as well. The trumpet is bold and brash and has the ability to call people to attention. It can be sweet and melancholy at the same time. Dan works hard at perfecting his technique on the trumpet. He studies various programs of how he can improve. Every chance he gets, Dan talks to others about the trumpet and his calling to play it. He invites everyone he can to hear him play, hoping that they too will fall in love with the trumpet, appreciate its personality, and play it with him. To Dan, the trumpet is the instrument of God's choosing. In fact, Dan secretly wishes that everyone would join him in playing the trumpet.

Bill plays the violin. He loves to play the violin. He has been playing the violin since he was a boy. He actually feels that he has been called to play the violin. Over the years of playing and practice, he has learned to appreciate, no love, the particular style of music that his violin makes. There is a certain personality to the violin that he loves and wishes that others would appreciate as well. The violin is sweet and graceful. It has the ability to soothe people and melt away their tensions. Bill works hard at perfecting his technique on the violin. He studies various programs of how he can improve. Every chance he gets, Bill talks to others about the violin and his calling to play it. He invites everyone he can to hear him play, hoping that they too will fall in love with the violin, appreciate its personality, and play it with him. To Bill, the violin is the instrument of God's choosing. In fact, Bill secretly wishes that everyone would join him in playing the violin.

You get the idea

OUR DILEMMA

The Trumpet can be played as a solo instrument, and produce wonderful and beautiful music. So also can the violin and the flute and even the drums. Each instrument has the ability to be played solo. There is nothing wrong in playing any instrument solo. There are times when that is

appropriate. However, there are inherent limitations to playing any instrument by itself. There are certain types of sounds, certain moods that can only be produced by all the instruments playing in harmony together. Take for example Handel's Messiah.

There is no single instrument would ever be able to effectively convey the proper set of tones, and emotions that would convey the message of "The Messiah." To do that, it takes a whole orchestra - all the various instruments working in harmony. No one instrument is sufficient for the task. We are called as the Body of Christ to play the music that will be the Handel's Messiah to the world. He is the focal point of every instrument and all the instruments together. Our musical score is to show the world who Jesus is.

So here is our dilemma. We have today a wonderful number and variety of instruments. These instruments can be your ministry, your church, your gifting, or your calling. Each of us sees our instrument or our ministry or our gifting as so important because it is the instrument that God called us to play. It is good to feel so strongly about the ministry, or gifting or calling that God has given to us. If we were honest, we sometimes really feel that others do not appreciate our ministry like we do, and we long and sometimes go to great lengths to let people know how important our "instrument" is. Even when we are hearing about what their instrument is, we are thinking about our own. Comparing their "instrument" with our "instrument." We have a tendency to inject into the conversation something about our own instrument to make sure they hear about how good our instrument is.

We are so intent on our instrument that we have lost the sense of call to play in the orchestra!

PLAYING IN THE ORCHESTRA

The call for the Body of Christ is that we play in the orchestra. There is a time and a place for practicing our own instrument. We need to perfect our skills and be the best at playing whatever instrument the Lord has called us to play. The purpose of our individual practice is so that we can be skilled to play in the orchestra. The orchestra is not a place for competition or jealousy. The trumpet section is not in competition with the flutes. The violins are not jealous that the clarinets are also in the orchestra. They know that each instrument has a unique place in the score of our music, "Handel's Messiah." Each of us has music that instructs us where and when we are to play. There are times when the notes that the bassoon plays are different that the notes someone else plays. There are times when the trumpets will not play while others will play. There are times when the trumpets play and others will not. This is not a reason to be jealous of one another. All of this is a part of the nature of the music.

I may not be "first chair" in my section, but as it has been said: "It takes more grace than I can tell, to play the second fiddle well." The conductor places each of us in the place in the orchestra where He knows we will play most effectively. In fact, if I really understand what it means to play in the orchestra, I will honor and be glad for all the other instruments, and the place others have in the orchestra. I will appreciate the uniqueness of each different instrument and how it lends its own uniqueness to the total sound of the orchestra. I will understand that in order for us to play "Handel's Messiah" we all need each other and must learn to play together.

We must practice together. But the nature of practice is that when we are practicing, there are bound to be mistakes and problems. In the orchestra, we understand that and realize that

mistakes are a part of learning to play together. An orchestra cannot survive if every time someone made a mistake the rest of the players walked out.

THE CONDUCTOR

In an orchestra, there is a great variety of instruments that are necessary to make the orchestra successful. There is, however, only one conductor. The conductor is the one and only one who is in charge. He has oversight of the score and all the instruments. When music is being played, he gives direction to each section of instruments.

The conductor knows all the music. He knows every note that every instrument is to play. Every musician must learn to keep his eyes on the conductor as well as his individual music he or she is to play. The conductor is the one who sets the pace for the entire orchestra. At various times depending on where they are in the musical piece, the conductor will direct a certain section or indicate a shift in rhythm.

The Lord Jesus is our conductor. He is the One that we all must keep our eyes on. He controls the musical score that we all are to follow. We all follow Him, no matter what the instrument that we play. It is easy to forget that fact. We can get so busy playing our instrument that we forget to look to the conductor. I am not responsible as a trumpet player for the violin section. That is the job of the conductor. My responsibility is to follow the conductor to the best of my ability and play the musical score He gave me to play.

MAKING IT REAL

Let's talk reality now. The parable of the orchestra is simply a way to help us all understand that whatever the instrument that I play; I am not the center of the orchestra. My ministry, my church, my gifts are a part of a greater whole. My instrument (my ministry, church, denomination, etc) is to be used as a part of the whole orchestra for the purpose of following the score that the Lord Jesus have given us. It is time, for the sake of those who need to hear the Gospel, that we put away our self-centeredness, our ambitions about our ministry, our sense of competition with other churches and ministries. There is no time for that anymore! The Conductor, the Lord Jesus Christ, is asking each one of us to play our part to the best of our ability, but within the context of the whole of the orchestra. We need one another. No one of us, not matter how deeply we feel about what we are doing, is the only player. No one of us, no matter how vital our ministry or gifting is the conductor. We are not the leaders. Only the Lord Jesus is the leader.

Perhaps you have never thought of your church, your ministry, or your denomination as a part of a greater whole. Maybe you have never thought about the fact that it takes the whole church to reach the whole city.

Maybe you need to confess that you have given into a spirit of competition with other churches and ministries.

Confess that as sin before the Lord and ask Him to bring you into relationship with other member of the “orchestra.”

Perhaps you need to find out what part in the orchestra your church or ministry is called to play, in cooperation with others that are also a part of the orchestra.

Our Wonderful Lord Jesus, We confess to you that we have lived too long independently, and in competition with one another. Reveal to us the ways that we need to be playing in the orchestra of your kingdom plans for our cities. Enable us my Your Holy Spirit to learn to be the best at the role you have given to us, and not be jealous or in competition with others who have different roles or who get more public attention. Help us to keep our eyes on You, Jesus, as our one and only conductor. Forgive us for the ways that we have held on to ministry as if it belonged to us, and bring to our cities a new lifestyle of Kingdom living for the Glory of Your Name. Amen.

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