

“Come And See...A Spacious Place”

Psalm 66:1-12

Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;

 sing the glory of God’s name; give to God glorious praise.

Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds!

Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you.

All the earth worships you;

 they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name.”

Come and see what God has done:

 God is awesome in deeds among mortals.

God turned the sea into dry land;

 they passed through the river on foot.

There we rejoiced in God,

 who rules by might forever,

 whose eyes keep watch on the nations;

 let the rebellious not exalt themselves.

Bless our God, O peoples,

 let the sound of God’s praise be heard,

 who has kept us among the living,

 and has not let our feet slip.

For you, O God, have tested us;

 you have tried us as silver is tried.

You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs;

 you let people ride over our heads;

 we went through fire and through water;

 yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.

Come And See...A Spacious Place
Psalm 66:1-12

October 9, 2022
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I.

This morning I would like to share with you a soon-to-be not so secret fantasy I've had for quite a number of years now. Relax, don't get nervous, it isn't *that* kind of fantasy. I admit it certainly is a bit wild, but not necessarily intimate. Then again, maybe it is?!?.

Before I get to all that, however, I would like to tell you how proud I am of our church. I'm proud of how good the church looks from the *outside* and how good the church feels from the *inside*. Neither thing, in itself, is any small feat. Having both of these occurring together, however, is a rare confluence. While we should be most concerned about what goes on *within* these walls of our church (and we most certainly are) the walls *themselves* are also of great significance; especially to those who live their lives beyond them.

II.

Having spent almost all of my free time for the past five years constructing a modest, single story, 300 square foot building, I can tell you this stone church and adjacent brick Christian Education wing each represent an *enormous* undertaking; both on the part of those who erected them, and, now, on the part of those who maintain them. Having spent the past 24 years working with all of you to build a congregation that is authentic, fun-loving, faith-filled, compassionate, generous and nonjudgemental, I can tell you that what we now enjoy as our life together is every bit as enormous in scope and, frankly, nothing short of miraculous. Awesome deeds, indeed; and, as I said, a rare confluence. Especially in this day and age with church membership, vitality and relevance on the wane in most of the nation, and as many congregations struggle just to keep the lamps lit and burning and stay one step ahead of the peeling paint.

III.

To be rather blunt about it, this church and this congregation excite me, inspire me and instill in me nothing less than a sense of awe and wonder. Some days, I just want to jump up and down. Which is exactly the kind of image that is conjured in our minds when we read today's scripture reading from the Psalm 66. The writer, as we readily witness, is pretty jacked up:

Make a joyful noise ALL the earth, sing the glory of God's name;

give to God glorious praise. Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!"

You can almost *hear* the pleading in the Psalmist voice when she says, "COME AND SEE!" Come and see the awesome deeds God has brought to this world and to our lives. Like turning the sea to dry land, which evokes memories of the Exodus from bondage in Egypt; as this is almost certainly a Psalm of thanksgiving sung at Passover.

IV.

This sentiment of COME AND SEE! is exactly the same thing *I* feel like shouting whenever I think about the awesome deeds God is accomplishing through this church and her congregation. It is also the very thing I wish to gently whisper in suggestion to those who come to the church for counseling or support and do not have a church home such as the one we have built and enjoy together with God: *come and see*.

Such words of invitation and enticement are exactly the kind of thing that belong spelled out in bright lights outside of our church. Which brings us right back to my aforementioned fantasy. Namely, a new sign in front of our church to replace the ancient, crumbling brick wall and letter board that currently sits at the corner of Park Street. Imagine, if you will, a brightly lit (but not garish) wifi-enabled, digital sign that could be programmed with a smart phone or computer to say *whatever* we wanted. What a game changer.

V.

No more sandwich board with letters to blow off, or be knocked over in the wind or to be carted-off halfway across town by overzealous college students who've partied a little too hard. We could advertise our Rummage Sale, Bazaar and fundraising dinners, as well as change the worship time, simply by typing them in on a keyboard. No more hanging ice-cold metal letters with bare fingers in the middle of winter while you crouch under the plexiglass door

which you are sure is going to come crashing down on your head with the next gust of wind. We could put the sermon title up each week, announce the birthdays or anniversaries of folks from the congregation, display public service announcements, remind people to vote, welcome students, and thank veterans all with a few key strokes done from the warmth and comfort of the building or, literally, anywhere on the planet. We'd give the the American Theater and their marquee a real run for their money.

VI.

Now, I'm sure I'm not alone in receiving those forwarded emails from church folk you know about the funny things that appear on the signs outside churches: Does your life stink? We've got a pew for you! God needs spiritual fruits, not religious nuts. Tweet others the way you'd like to be tweeted. Whoever is praying for snow please stop. Having trouble sleeping? Try one of our pastor's sermons. Now is a good time to visit, our pastor is on vacation. God loves you whether you like it or not. Prevent truth decay, brush up on your bible. Too cold to change the sign. Message inside. Walmart is not the only saving place, come on in. Jesus is coming. Look busy. Though such sayings are often at least marginally amusing, if we ever did erect one of those programable signs I can absolutely guarantee we would be taking a *much* deeper dive.

VII.

This fantasy of mine, about having a programable sign, really starts to reach full bloom when I consider all the catchy and clever sayings I could post; what fun! For starters, there would be the occasional song lyric from the Grateful Dead (Our job is to shed light not to master it.), quotes (The privilege of a lifetime is becoming who you really are. - Carl Jung) or poignant scripture verse (All the rivers run to the sea but still it is not full. - Ecclesiastes 1:7) I'm telling you, it would get to be a real "thing" here in Canton, with people wondering each week, "What are the Presbyterians going to say *next*?" We'd be the talk of the town, no doubt about it.

VIII.

In fact, for the past 24 years I've been collecting these sayings as they pop into my head and saving them to my computer:

Let's get it together...together.

Truth seekers and truth speakers welcome here.

Faith isn't about having the answers, it's about living with the questions.

Put yourself in a position to be kind.

Don't wait to celebrate.

It is our responsibility to be part of the larger plan.

We don't have all the answers, but we do take all the questions.

Preaching more and more, about less and less.

The crisis is on its way, it will solve everything.

Intelligence is the ability to discern the difference between things;
wisdom is not needing to.

You don't realize you have the gift until you give it to another.

Faith is not a possession it is a lifestyle.

It is less about being led and more about finding our way.

Awareness is the first degree of involvement.

Are you moving mountains? Be sure to put them in the right place.

This week, our snazzy electronic programmable sign would undoubtedly have read: Come and See!

IX.

A few years ago, I actually got to the point of calling a local sign company to get a price on such a sign and just about fell off my chair: anywhere from five to seven thousand dollars!!! Clearly my fantasy will have to remain just that, a fantasy. That is an *awful* lot of money with which to roll dice when we have no idea, whatsoever, what kind of impact it would have; if any. Time and time again, research has shown that the very best marketing campaign for a church is word-of-mouth; inviting friends and neighbors to simply, "Come and See."

Which, of course, begs the question, "Come and see *what*, exactly? Well, certainly there are the kinds of mighty deeds of God spoken of in Psalm 66, but those tend to come either with a certain unpredictable frequency, or slowly over time such that they are hard to detect on any given day.

X.

I think a better answer to the question is to be found at the very end of today's scripture reading. What we are inviting people to come and see is a *spacious place*. Though lofty and impressive, this does not refer to the size of our sanctuary but, rather, having the space, the room and the opportunity to grow, and roam, and rest, and explore, and remember, and make mistakes and, as Carl Jung said, for people to find out not only who they *really* are; but also who they *want* to be and who they are *meant* to be.

Here on the Park, we aren't interested in hemming people in with oppressive rules, excessive doctrine or undue social pressure. Instead, we are here to *help*, God and each other, to loose the fetters placed upon our lives, to breath deep, stretch out, plumb the depths, to sustain the journey and to bring a sense of wonder, awe and appreciation for all that God provides us. To attain a breath-catching view of this world, and our place in it, from the vantage point of the vistas provided by our very own heart, mind and spirit.

XI.

If I am completely honest, I *do* have a fantasy but it really has nothing to do with a fancy programmable sign. It has to do with this church, *our* church, being the talk of the town. Not because of the things we *say*, but because of the things we *do* and what we *provide*: a spacious place where we can be *intimate* with each other. Where you truly get to know people, and be known by others, in authentic ways. Where we stop pretending and just be real with one another. Where we have sufficient trust in ourselves and our neighbors to allow ourselves to be vulnerable. Where we can give actually live out our faith as a lifestyle; or, at the very least, make an honest attempt to do so. And, to share all of this with the people who are living their lives from within these walls and, especially, beyond them. (Almost Amen.)

XII.

In the spirit of sharing, I'd like to add an addendum to today's sermon. As is found in several other places in the bible, today's reading begins with the admonition that all the earth "make a joyful noise to God." I love the idea of a "joyful noise," though confess to never really being sure the exact nature of such a "joyful noise." This week I figured it out when Sean sent me this photo

of his and Kristin's son, Lachlan, finally being brought out to a spacious place which is this world. A joyful noise indeed. Amen.

