

“The Sanctuaries of our Lives”

(with the drama “Danielle’s Big Day”)

Psalm 15; Matthew 5:1-12

February 2, 2014

Mary Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church, Milford, Connecticut

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Are we prepared to meet God?

It’s usually a question asked by more theologically conservative folks in reference to the end of our life on earth.

But what if it’s a question about this morning? Right here. Right now. Are we prepared to meet God?

Because that’s what we sang at our opening and that’s what we believe: that God is with us. Right here. Right now. That worship is not just *about* God. Worship is one way we meet God and allow ourselves to be met by God.

That is part of what it is to experience sanctuary. To be *in* the sanctuary is one thing; to experience sanctuary is another.

Our Psalm today addresses this directly. Psalms were written to prepare for worship and to praise God in worship. This psalm, Psalm 15, was an entrance psalm used by pilgrims who arrived in Jerusalem as they entered the gates of the temple.

The temple did not have a sign that said, “Join us for worship.” In fact, some people—with deformities or handicaps, skin ailments or improper parentage—were barred from entering. There were also certain times in one’s life (Deut. 23:1-8) when one would not be admitted to the temple. I do not advocate returning to these restrictions, but understanding them helps us understand the reverence with which the ancients viewed worship.

So imagine, having come from some distance and at some sacrifice to the temple. You wait outside in anticipation. Finally the gates are opened and worship begins. With those assembled you ask “O Lord, who shall abide in your tent? Who shall dwell in your holy hill?” You ask this question of yourself but mostly of God.

And here's the thing: God answers! That's right! God responds in the psalm with ten qualities of a true worshipper. Whoever:

- Lives blamelessly,
- Acts uprightly
- Speaks truth from the heart
- Keeps the tongue under control
- Does not wrong a friend
- Casts no discredit on a neighbor
- Honors those who fear God
- Stands by an oath at any cost
- Asks no interest on loans
- Takes no bribe.

And quickly we realize that none is truly worthy. Yet that realization is not so bad for it allows us to ask ourselves, "Have I prepared myself to enter into this sanctuary and this time of worship?" "Am I opening my heart and mind to God and others?" "Am I willing to be in this community even when there are difficulties and misunderstandings?" "Did I just 'show up' and expect God to do all the heavy lifting?" "Do I expect God to be here?"

Do we expect the subject of the celebration to be here? Apparently her friends did not, as we hear in "Danielle's Big Day."

[Drama script here]

Why go to all the work to plan this?

Sometimes it takes the eyes of an outsider to remind us. Thirty years ago the neighborhood church I served in Queens was like this one: beautiful. It's warm exterior beige brick, dark interior woods, high vaulted ceiling and flying arches created a special warmth.

One afternoon a knock came on the exterior door of my office. I was alone, and even the brazenness of a young clergyman was not always a match for the challenge of the city when alone. I opened the door and a man stood there; a man a bit rough around the edges; who had seen the harder side of life; and who I presumed was there to ask for

the food and drink I supposed he didn't have. "May I help you?" "Yes. I've been by your church many times and I'd like to see it and pray for a while." Oh. I wondered, may God forgive me, what his real motives were. Still, the LaRosas were next door, the Kirchsteins across the street, the Herzogs across the intersection. If there was trouble I could outrun him. So I let him in to the sanctuary.

He marveled at its beauty and then wordlessly knelt at the Communion rail. I told him I'd be in the office, a few steps away, if he needed me; and to let me know when he was ready to leave. About a half-hour later, he did. If my life depended on it I couldn't tell you what his parting words were. But I remember his tears; and the lightness of his gratitude; and I knew that he had encountered a Presence in that place that I may have taken for granted.

When we believe that God is here and that all we prepare is for God, not only do we encounter God in the sanctuary but we, ourselves, are made a sanctuary because we have encountered God. Mark Richardson, a United Methodist pastor in central California, tells of the time he gave permission for a traveling youth choir to sleep in his church. They showed up road-weary and ready for sleep. Rev. Richardson showed them where to bunk down.

But before they unload their vans, the director said they wanted to thank the church for providing a "sanctuary" in which they could rest body and soul. She whispered some words to the 30 or so young people, gave them a starting pitch, and in the dimly lit narthex they sang:

*"Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary
Pure and holy, tried and true
With thanksgiving, I'll be a living
sanctuary for you.*

CROSSPOINT

#2

#1 - John

#3 - Lisa

#2 - Sarah

Danielle - Stacey

S C R I P T S E R V I C E



Danielle's Dan's Big Day

Synopsis: Small town committee plans to honor the Mayor thinking he'll be out of town and unable to be present. Halfway through the honors, they spot him in the room, and backpeddle on their plans. Illustrates how easy it is to forget God's presence even as we gather to honor Him. Use it right at the beginning of a service as a Call to Worship.

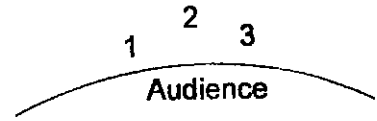
Topics: Worship, Praise, God's Presence, Holy Spirit.

Time: 4 minutes.

Characters: The 3 characters at the front can be of any gender and are not significantly different from each other. Together they are well-meaning, sincere, confident at first, and then embarrassed toward the end. Dan is mild-mannered and not impressed with himself. Just an average guy.

Props: None.

Stage Setup:



D
direction script

Author's Note: Scene opens on 1, 2 & 3 who are standing up to address a crowd. They speak in a sort of tag-team style, reinforcing each other's points. The two who aren't speaking should be looking at the one who is. Although they sincerely appreciate the Mayor, there's a distance to their delivery and a sense that this is driven more by tradition than by immediate conviction.

1: Good morning and welcome to our 17th Annual Community Picnic. We wanted to take this opportunity to honor someone who has made an outstanding contribution to this community. Let's give a warm round of applause for our citizen of the year... No surprise to anyone, I'm sure... Mayor Dan Philips.

#1 leads crowd in applause Danielle
2: I'd like to just say a few words about Dan, because Dan... well she has really changed this town for the better. Most of you already know about what he's done, so I won't go into detail here. But if you remember what it was like before Dan started giving to this community, you'll know what we mean. Danielle

1: A lot of us have stories like that. We know everything Dan has done here. The new community initiatives that have cleaned up downtown. Given us new hope and direction. And that's why we're here this morning to show our appreciation.

1 minute mark

3: That's right. In fact, to get things started here, maybe we should lift up our voices in tribute. Join me, will you? Mayor

#3 leads in a chorus of "For He's A Jolly Good Fellow"

1: He is a good fellow, and we all know that, don't we?

2: We do. But you know it wasn't too long ago that this community was pretty much down on its luck. We didn't even believe in ourselves.

3: But the things Dan has done, why they're turned things around. Danielle

Dan's Big Day

direction script

1: Yes they have. I think it's safe to say she's the best thing that's ever happened to us.

2: And that's why we're gathered here today. To remember Mayor Dan and all she's done.

Danielle
1: To give thanks.

2: A small token of our gratitude.

3: A symbol of this community's love and affection. So if you see *Danielle* ~~Dan~~ around this week, take a minute and let ~~him~~ know how much- (squinting toward audience) how much you- ~~Dan?~~ *her*

Dan: Yes.

Danielle?

3: You're here?

Dan: Yes. Aren't I supposed to be here?

2: Well we thought... there was a message...

1: We thought you needed to be out of town.

3: We thought you were gone!

Dan: No, I'm quite here. Sorry to throw you off.

3: No, no. It's fine. It's great.

2: Yes! Yes, we're glad you're here. Really.

1: It just sorta... we weren't expecting it.

Dan: I said I'd be here.

2: We just didn't know you'd be literally... here. We thought it was like, you know, "I'll be there in sentiment."

Dan: No, I meant I'd actually be here.

1: We're just a little surprised is all.

Dan: Well, that's Ok. The point is, I'm here, right?

3: Right! Yes, that's the point.

2: Well if we'd known you were coming... I mean we would have... it would have changed things.

Dan: It's Ok.

2: No, I mean we would have... introduced you.

3: Had you sit down here in front.

1: Shook your hand.

Dan: Well, maybe next time.

2: Yeah, next time we'll be ready.

1: It's just we feel sorta silly doing this whole program about you when you were sittin right there!

2 minute mark



Blocking: Dan stands to speak.



Blocking: There's no complicated blocking here. 1, 2, & 3 remain on stage, but shouldn't feel "glued" down. They should roam naturally. Dan speaks from the audience while standing.

3 minute mark

Dan's Big Day

script direction

Dan: Well now that we've cleared that up. Are we done?

1: Done?

Dan: Yeah. I mean is there anything else?

1: Um... well, we had a plaque made. But it wasn't finished on time. I can just... I'll just drop it by your office this week.

Dan: That'll be fine. Thanks. So... I'll just be heading back downtown?

2: Ok.

3: Sure.

1: See ya, Mayor.


2: Yeah, thanks for coming.

Dan: I'm just a little curious...

2: What?

Dan: If you didn't think I'd be here, why did you go to the work to plan all this?

Lights Ou

Blocking: Dan starts to exit, then turns back to inquire. After his question, the 3 glance at each other awkwardly before the lights dim. 

4 minute mark



SCRIPTURE LINK:

MARK 7:5-7
SO THE PHARISEES
AND TEACHERS OF
THE LAW ASKED JESUS,
"WHY DON'T YOUR DISCI-
PLES LIVE ACCORDING TO
THE TRADITION OF THE
ELDERS INSTEAD OF EAT-
ING THEIR FOOD WITH
'UNCLEAN' HANDS?" HE
REPLIED, "ISAIAH WAS
RIGHT WHEN HE PROPHE-
SIED ABOUT YOU
HYPOCRITES; AS IT IS
WRITTEN: "THESE PEOPLE
HONOR ME WITH THEIR
LIPS, BUT THEIR HEARTS
ARE FAR FROM ME. THEY
WORSHIP ME IN VAIN;
THEIR TEACHINGS ARE
BUT RULES
TAUGHT BY MEN.