Psalms of Lament and Worship in a Stormy World

By Nicholas Zork

Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me. I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched. My eyes fail, looking for my God.

(Psalm 69:1-3 NIV)

There are many things we might learn from Scripture’s most significant liturgical resource -- the Book of Psalms. Over the past two weeks, I have grown to more fully appreciate one particular characteristic of biblical Psalms: the honesty with which these worship songs connect hope with present circumstances. It is difficult for me to read the opening lines of Psalm 69 without thinking of my neighbors in New York City, many of whom are just beginning a long and difficult recovery from Sandy’s devastating winds and waters. The metaphorical language of Psalm 69 rings true in a way that resonates with the experience of literal “deep waters” in recent days. David’s visceral lament -- with descriptions of a parched throat, failing eyes, and real threats to his life -- reveal of man in genuine need of rescue. And the rescue he seeks is not a disembodied experience of spiritual salvation but a rescue of spirit, mind, and body alike. Toward the end of this Psalm, David is able to resound a note of genuine hope because of his faith in a God who is not distant from our struggles but truly “hears the needy.” (Psalm 69:33)

Compare Psalm 69 to the words of a popular contemporary worship song -- one which I admit I have often appreciated:

When the oceans rise and thunders roar
I will soar with You above the storm  
Father You are king over the flood  
I will be still and know You are God  
(“Still”)

What might these words mean to someone in the midst of an actual destructive storm and flood? Do we really serve a God who soars “above the storm,” surveying our situation from afar? And is our hope really that we might join this God in a place stillness above life’s pain and suffering? How can this song give voice to the cries of those whose prayers for deliverance were not answered? Unlike Psalm 69, this song’s stormy metaphors have a hopeful gloss that keeps them from resonating with the current situation.

Lament is the most common form in the Psalms, but laments like David’s are almost completely absent from contemporary Christian worship. And without such language of discontent, without our protest to present circumstances, we risk inadvertently implying that God is distant, other-worldly, and unconcerned with our real struggles. Without honest lament about our spiritual and physical challenges, our songs of deliverance begin to suggest a longing for escape from a world God has abandoned rather than renewal of the world God loves.

I do not pretend to know all that God was doing as Sandy took the homes and lives of many on the East Coast. But I do know that God was not soaring “above the storm,” assessing damage from a celestial VIP lounge. “The LORD hears the needy” because God is present with them in the midst and aftermath of storms; and we are called to join God there as well. So when we gather to sing, may we like David have the faith to honestly protest and lament circumstances we cannot accept -- circumstances God does not accept. And may we experience the full measure of God's true deliverance: not merely spiritual peace that leads to stillness but a holy discontent that leads to action -- the action of joining God in the Kingdom work of renewing this beautiful and broken world.

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Ecos de Adoración

Elijiendo Cantos en Contextos Adventistas

By Andres Flores

Nuestro himnario es una compilación de himnos y cantos de alabanza escritos y arreglados por autores de diferentes tradiciones de la fe Cristiana. Algunos, la gran minoría, son escritos por autores Adventistas. Por ejemplo, el himno “Santo, Santo, Santo” incluido en el Nuevo Himnario Adventista, fue escrito por Reginald Heber -- un escritor de himnos spirituality and come to a spirituality that is both deeply grounded in Scripture and radically relevant to the world. . . . The basis for Christian spirituality is the Spirit -- the Holy Spirit of God. Therefore, in biblical parlance one is ‘spiritual’ not because one is primarily concerned with ‘spiritual’ things in contrast to the ‘material’ but because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. A ‘spiritual’ person is not one who flexes and develops his or her spirit, as an athlete flexes and develops muscles, but one in whom the Spirit of the Lord dwells.”

Worship Gatherings

The One Project in Chicago: February 11-12, 2013

The One project celebrates the supremacy of Jesus in the Adventist Church through gatherings, preaching, teaching, and resources. The upcoming One project gathering in Chicago will blend meaningful worship, thoughtful presentations, and deep conversations---all about Jesus. The material will be drawn exclusively from His biblical biographies: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Together participants will explore prayers and parables, sufferings and celebration, miracles and words of Christ. Come to celebrate and learn from Christ—leave refreshed and refocused for His glory.

For more information and to register, visit http://www.the1project.org

Gender Inclusive Worship Planning
quien sirvió como Obispo anglicano de Calcuta en el siglo 17. Este hermoso himno fue escrito como un poema para celebrar la doctrina de la Trinidad en y está basado parcialmente en Isaias 6:1-5. Otro claro ejemplo es el himno “Señor, mi Dios” también presente en el nuevo himnario Adventista. Este bello canto fue compuesto por Carl Boberg, un predicador sueco quien originalmente lo escribió solamente como un poema pero mas tarde fue popularizado en Estados Unidos las reuniones evangelísticas de Billy Graham ¿Qué es lo que hace que el himnario sea Adventista? ¿Qué criterios se pueden usar para elegir cantos e himnos en las Iglesias Adventistas?

Los himnos en el himnario son Adventistas por que enfatizan temas teológicos que entrelazan nuestra fe Adventista con el espectro doctrinal de la fe bíblica en el contexto Judeo-Cristiano. El Adventismo no puede ser entendido divorciado de tal contexto. Tal realidad debería de hacernos consientes de que la pintura que Dios ha pintado de sí mismo a través de la historia al mundo ha sido completada por diferentes tradiciones de fe, una de ellas la Adventista. Cuando cantamos himnos “Adventistas” estamos afirmando realidades que enfatizan nuestra identidad pero al mismo tiempo realidades que están conectadas a la tradición Cristiana como un todo. No cantamos para celebrar nuestra separación de otras tradiciones, tampoco cantamos para celebrar nuestra identidad. Cantamos para adorar a Dios por lo que Él es y por sus enseñanzas inmutables. En realidad nuestros cantos de adoración tienen que ver menos con nosotros y mas acerca de la grandeza y la majestad de Dios. Ofrezco a continuación unas breves pautas para elegir cantos de adoración en contextos Adventistas. Los pastores y ancianos de Iglesia pueden usar estas pautas como un criterio para hacer decisiones prácticas en las experiencias de adoración:

- Elige cantos que necesiten poca interpretación, con un mensaje claro pero no simplista. Por ejemplo, el canto “Cuan Grande es Dios” escrito por Tomlin, Reeve y Cash es un poema de adoración que es sencillo, fácil de aprender, pero contiene un mensaje profundo de la persona y el carácter de Dios. Si un canto necesita ser explicado, intenta remplazarlo por uno que sea entendible y profundo.

- Busca cantos que sean relevantes para el contexto cultural de tu iglesia y la comunidad donde se encuentra la Iglesia. Si tu Iglesia está localizada en una comunidad con una población alta de jóvenes de segunda y tercera generación, seria prudente usar himnos contemporáneos que los conecten con nuestra fe Adventista pero al mismo tiempo sean fácilmente comprendido por este grupo específico.

- Elige cantos que muevan a la reflexión y a la acción. La adoración es completa y verdaderamente Adventista cuando nos mueve a hacer la diferencia en la vida de creyentes y no creyentes. Esta acción será el resultado de una reflexión en la misión de la Iglesia, la muerte expiatoria de Cristo y la realidad de su segunda
Usa cantos que expresen fielmente nuestra fe Adventista. La fe Adventista cuando es expresada con excelencia proyecta una imagen clara de Cristo y su plan de redención.

Elegir cantos en contextos Adventistas requiere discernimiento musical y teológico. Al mismo tiempo se necesita un entendimiento claro de la realidad que nuestra fe no está separada de la tradición Judeo-Cristiano y que está conectada a la misma. Nuestras creencias distintivas nos darán un punto de referencia para expresar nuestra fe en Cristo de una forma amplia y bíblica. Esta expresión será clara y transformará la vida de los adoradores.

Visual Worship Leading

The Design of Worshipful Spaces (Part 1)

By Dannon Rampton

How important is interior design in the worship experience? Well, how important is a first impression?

Many of my most memorable worship experiences had nothing to do with the decor. Likewise, I can't remember how I first met many of my closest friends. But just as first impressions can go a long way towards launching a new friendship, I would suggest that good design can play an important role in inviting new worshipers to become regular participants.

Worship space design probably has a lesser impact on long-time members of a community because those members already have their reasons for coming -- the connections they have with other members, the music they enjoy, the duty they feel as Christians, or something in the messages that keeps them coming back. Interior design is by definition a bit superficial, and if that's what influences someone to remain involved over time, he or she probably needs to reexamine their reasons for coming to church in the first place. But the design of a space has a bigger impact on someone visiting the church. It makes a statement about the values of the community, and it's one of the first messages a visitor gets, among a multitude of voices contributing to their subconscious evaluation of the experience.

Check back in upcoming issues of this publication as we'll explore what the design of your place of worship might say about your community. And for now, take some time to look at your space through the eyes of a visitor, and thoughtfully consider what sort of a first impression it makes.

[Editor's note: Dannon Rampton is an interior designer in Los Angeles. He has agreed to lead a four-part discussion on interior design in worship. Get involved by

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