Dear Lexie,

Children of Hope

I'm not sure if it's just me, but there appears to be a great deal of suffering in our midst these days. Whether it's someone that has lost his or her job as the result of the ever plunging economy, or the loss of a loved one at the hand of some emotionally unstable individual. It seems as though that no matter where you turn these days, you encounter people who are experiencing some extremely difficult times in their lives. Now, I am by no means naïve. I fully recognize that this is nothing new, and that as long as this world continues to exist, suffering in one degree or another will forever be a fixture of our human experience.

The Wonder of Worship
This Sabbath:
October 26, 2013
Speaker:
Gerry Lopez
"Your Greatest Legacy"
Special Musical Guests:
Sligo Middle School Choir,
Joya Follette, Director
Sligo Strings,
Emily Campbell, Director

House Hunting
I love the saying, "Home is where the heart is." To me this adage conjures up the feeling that home is where I can express my emotions freely. Home is where our first love relationships are developed and...

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Music of the Spheres:
The Heavenly Jazz Band
This is one of my favorite hymns, and I've always been intrigued by the phrase "music of the spheres." How many of us finite beings can gaze upon the universe and hear music?

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Hope in Shame
Thought by Barry Casey
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Children of Hope

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I’m not sure if it’s just me, but there appears to be a great deal of suffering in our midst these days. Whether it’s someone that has lost his or her job as the result of the ever plunging economy, or the loss of a loved one at the hand of some emotionally unstable individual. It seems as though that no matter where you turn these days, you encounter people who are experiencing some extremely difficult times in their lives. Now, I am by no means naïve. I fully recognize that this is nothing new, and that as long as this world continues to exist, suffering in one degree or another will forever be a fixture of our human experience.

What I have encountered of late that I had not experienced in times past, at least not to the degree that I see it today, is a sense of a loss. But it hasn’t been a loss of jobs, money or other material things that so many in our culture strive to acquire. There appears to be in the hearts of many people today, a sense of a loss of hope. As a matter of fact, I would even go as far to say that in many ways, it has the potential of reaching epidemic proportions. There are some that say the reason behind many of the mass shootings that have recently taken our country by storm is the result of individuals who have reached a point in their lives where for them, hope appears hopeless.

But there is an aspect of this condition that has really caught my attention of late, and that is that many who are saying that they are losing hope are among those who claim to have the greatest hope. Yes, that’s right. There are many believers in our midst who are beginning to lose hope or have lost it all together. For some reason what had given them hope in the past no longer appears to satisfy their discontent. Whatever happened to those believers who once sang with great gusto, “We have this hope that burns within our hearts…”? In other words, what has happened to the children of hope?

My purpose for writing this is not to provide what I believe is the answer to this dilemma, because quite frankly, I’m not completely sure that I know. But what I would like to accomplish with this piece is to hear from you. Whether you are one that has encountered this sense of hopelessness in the lives of others, or whether you are one that is drowning in the sea of your own despair and for you, hope is either a distant memory or a friend that has forsaken you. Please let me know. What has happened to the “children of hope?”
The Wonder of Worship: House Hunting

I love the saying, “Home is where the heart is.” To me this adage conjures up the feeling that home is where I can express my emotions freely. Home is where our first love relationships are developed and nurtured. Despite our tough economy, we still go house hunting for the perfect home. For many, homeownership offers financial and emotional security. Today homeownership is still praised as a way to fulfill our dreams.

Yet our emotional connection to home was designed by God. On the sixth day God created man and placed him in a perfect paradise home – the Garden of Eden. Then on the seventh day God established worship (Gen. 2:2-3). God spent intimate worship time with Adam and Eve in Eden. He walked in the garden in the cool of the day (Gen. 3:8). Adam and Eve lived in God’s presence. It was only after they sinned that they went house hunting and then sadly were evicted.

Worship is a lifestyle that reflects our love relationship with God. To God, we can express our emotions. Each week we come together to worship in the Lord’s house, where He has promised to dwell with us (Ex.25:8). Worship is not the music that we play nor the songs that we sing. At times we are like Adam and Eve. We are tempted to go church house hunting in search of the music that suits our fancy. However, true worship is not about our preferred style of music. In true worship God reveals Himself, His purposes and His will to us, through a relationship with Jesus Christ. As worshipers, we respond to God in obedience, adoration, submission and humility (O-ASH). In worship we experience God so that He can transform our lives.

The Hebrew word for worship, “shachah,” means to depress, prostrate in homage to royalty, bow down. Moses asked to see God’s glory and worshiped Him after He passed by (Ex. 34:8). The Greek word for worship “proskuneo” means to kiss. Jesus used this word to describe worship in spirit and in truth to the Woman at the Well (John 4:24). Both words describe nearness and intimacy to God that doesn’t depend on any music! Worship depends on our desire to be in relationship with God. True worship allows us to fulfill God’s dream to give us a mansion bright and blessed. In true worship we stop house hunting and let the Holy Spirit make a home in our hearts.
Music of the Spheres: The Heavenly Jazz Band

Jamie Jean

“This is my Father’s world, and to my listening ears all nature sings, and round me rings the music of the spheres.” (This My Father’s World by Maltbie Davenport Babcock)

This is one of my favorite hymns, and I’ve always been intrigued by the phrase “music of the spheres.” How many of us finite beings can gaze upon the universe and hear music? One can try to fathom the vastness of the heavens, and be awed by the Lord’s awesome creation. But perceive music…doesn’t seem likely.

The apostle Paul wrote,

“For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.” (Rom. 1:20)

“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?” (Job 38:4-7)

Music is generally attributed to humans, but God, the creator of music, created a universe that sings His praises—whether it’s birds, tiny crickets, rustling leaves, or enormous stars. Those who are blessed with the gift of music and color (synesthesia), see music in everyday life and every animate or inanimate thing. To me, the ubiquity of music (color and song) is assurance of the presence of God, for the universe cannot help but sing of His glory when He is present. God is omnipresent, so the music never fades. We only need to listen to know that He is near.

Stars by definition are “

A self-luminous celestial body consisting of a mass of gas held together by its own gravity in which the energy generated by nuclear reactions in the interior is balanced by the outflow of energy to the surface, and the inward-directed gravitational forces are balanced by the outward-directed gas and radiation pressures.” (dictionary.com)

Based on this description, one would not expect stars to also be musical.

Science recently discovered that the X-ray patterns of stars can be converted to music. In fact, NASA has developed software that converts scientific data of all kinds into synthesized musical sounds to aid in analyzing data. But it doesn’t stop there, researcher Gerhard Sonnert realized X-ray emissions from EX Hydrae resembled a clave rhythm, common in Afro-Cuban music. (I’m not making this up!)

Sonnert then got the idea to convert the sounds from EX Hydrae, some 200 light-years away, into blues, jazz and classical music. As part of the Star Songs project, he worked with his cousin Volkmar Studtrucker, a composer, to manually convert the ‘data’ into nine different songs. (Isn’t that amazing?!?!?) What resulted is beautiful music straight from the heavens.

God left His signature everywhere, and His creation gives glory to His name. He commands the heavens to sing, and they actually do. It’s not a metaphor. We, as humans, merely need to use tools to interpret the songs, and therefore, know that He is God.

“Sing O heavens; For the Lord has done it…” (Isaiah 44:23)

Click here to learn more and listen to star song examples.
The Hope in Shame

Barry Casey

“We have lost a sense of moral clarity that would give rise to the fear that certain actions—whether we privately feel guilty about them or not—could lead to disgrace. For they don’t. If enough, and enough well-placed people do them, the only disgrace you need fear is the failure to get away with it.” — Susan Neiman, Moral Clarity, 369.

In 1994 Quentin Tarantino’s film, *Pulp Fiction*, was released and immediately bent the needle of the outrage meter. No matter. It went on to win an Oscar and solidified Tarantino’s bad-boy status. Critics said it glorified violence, but they were not quite right. It didn’t glorify violence so much as trivialize the pain behind the violence.

After the outcry died down I went to see it. In one scene, John Travolta turns on a guy who is slumped in the back seat of the car they are riding in, and threatens him with a gun. But the gun accidentally goes off, splattering the guy’s brains all over the back window. Travolta’s reaction provoked an instant response in the theatre: almost everyone laughed. Nervously, at first, and in embarrassment, but laughter nonetheless. I felt three reactions in rapid succession: shock with revulsion, spasmodic hilarity, followed by shame and bewilderment. It was the shame that stayed with me long after the plot line had faded. I was trying to understand why I and so many others had reacted that way.

It’s not hard to figure that we cover our embarrassment with laughter, but why are we embarrassed? It’s not as if we need to apologize to the character, a fictional being after all. Would we have laughed watching it by ourselves? It occurred to me that one reason for our embarrassment was that we didn’t want others to think we were stone-cold and heartless. On reflection I came to think embarrassment was the appropriate response. It means that there’s still something in us that can’t bear to watch someone’s humiliation at their most vulnerable moment.

“Guilt,” says philosopher Susan Neiman, “is the internal sense that you’ve done something wrong, even if no one ever discovers it. Shame records your consciousness of wrong before a community whose values you honor.” There it is: our moral behavior has a powerful social kick behind it. We want to do right, to be in favor with God and man. Like it or not we carry the community with us and we measure ourselves up against its approval—“approbation” is what philosopher Adam Smith called it in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

Smith thought that we were basically good people, but he saw the approval or contempt of society as a means for keeping our conduct in line with social norms. It was in our interest to do right and receive the praise of others just as the implied threat of community anger at our actions would fill us with shame. That depends, of course, on whether we care at all what others think of us. Smith was pretty sure most people did care, leaving out the insane and the psychopaths, of course. And just as his “invisible hand” guided the spirit and function of capitalism, so his “moral sentiments” appealed to our self-interests, as well as the interests of a stable society. The balance and order was kept because most of us had both the need and capacity to love and be loved as well as the need to avoid the disapproval of our community.

Neiman makes a persuasive case that shamelessness is pervasive in our culture and our lack of shame is what made such violations of human rights as Abu Ghraib possible. “If the ideal of human rights is destroyed by the violations that were said to be needed to realize it, our children will pay the price. Many of them are already paying, for they believe in next to nothing.”

It’s easy to lose sight of the presence of human decency when we face into the perfect storm of perversity in the media every day. I’m not ranting about particular TV shows, films, fashions, musicians, Wall Street shysters, TV evangelists, or politicians. What I’m trying to get at is the underlying tone of mockery at the human plight that runs through so much of media culture. You can’t avoid it at movie previews where upcoming films, all PG-13 at least, are reduced to slapstick or thunderous exhibitions of firepower. It was there in the photos of grinning soldiers posing with heaps of humiliated and terrified Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib. It is there when Lance Armstrong, a symbol of courage and endurance to millions, bullies his way through years of doping, lying, and degrading the sport.

Neiman believes that the only way to reverse the erosion of shame is to “return to the language of good and evil.” In a culture such as ours, in which a helpless relativism reduces moral dialogue to diatribes or a pouty solipsism, this is strong stuff. The word “evil” is over-used and abused, trivialized and rendered almost meaningless when it is applied where it does not belong. But even more threatening to our own sense of human dignity is when we refuse to apply it to our own actions—we frail, bumbling, confused and pitifully arrogant human
beings.

Kant thought the foundational principle of right action was this: *Act so that you never treat other people as a means to an end, but as ends in themselves.* That means that we treat ourselves with respect and treat everyone else, even our enemies, with respect also. To demean and demonize them means first of all that we could wish for such a world in which everyone did just that.

We have the means but not the wisdom nor the right to call anyone evil. But recognizing our limitations in that regard does not mean we should give up on trying to understand why we—and others—may do evil actions. We are so easily drawn into situations in which evil actions are the consequence of fear and ignorance; we need a reverence toward words and language such that we could choose to speak of good and evil again.

The degradation of our humanity sometimes pulls us down through enormous events such as genocide or the systematic rape and exploitation of women. But if we regain, as a society, the capacity to be ashamed of our evil actions, there is hope. We can retrace our steps, make amends, learn humility, and receive grace.

If evil is not in our nature but in our actions, there is hope. We do have choices, tragic though they might be at times. But if we wish to remain human we cannot be passive. Our humanity erodes, slips away, sifts through our fingers when we look only to our own self-interest. This freedom to shape our responses in situations both mundane and extreme is what separates us from lentils and aphids. It truly is the image of God in us.

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