

The Power of Personal Praise

Psalm 66:1-7
Matthew 7:24-29

October 1, 2017
Faith Community

Back in 1997, a movie came out with a very simple title: "Contact." If you have a geeky bone in your body, you probably saw it at one time or another. Based on a Carl Sagan novel of the same name, it follows the exploits of Dr. Eleanor "Ellie" Arroway, played by Jodie Foster, as she searches the universe for Extraterrestrial Intelligence.

Ellie picks up a signal from some unknown entity 'out there' and downloads more than 60,000 pages of technical drawings for a machine that would enable a person to explore unheard of places, dimensions and times. As the movie unfolds there are the expected plot twists, betrayals, romance, suspense, all that good stuff, and it climaxes when the good doctor climbs aboard the machine and is thrust into some kind of cosmic world, worm hole, or parallel universe.

As soon as Ellie arrives at wherever it is she's arrivedt, she's struck by the beauty of the place, and she says one line to herself:

"They should've sent a poet."

I was smitten by that. I stopped the movie and backed it up to be sure I heard it right, then I did a Google search and there it was again. Think of it, friends:

A brilliant scientist
Supremely capable
At the pinnacle of her career
A machine the likes of which the world had never seen
And they should've sent a poet

That one line was worth the entire movie. It's all about wonder, friends.

One of the liturgical options I offer my brides and grooms for their ceremony encourages them to maintain their capacity for wonder, and I long for that same thing for you and me in our lives together.

Near the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Christ tells his listeners this:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. (Matthew 7:24, TMSG)

Friends, whatever your achievements, however refined your skill or expertise, no matter your successes or how far short of them you may fall, being a Christ follower gives you a foundation that goes deeper than any of that ever will, along with a courageous openness to surprise and discovery.

You cannot live like that if you settle for typical life that sucks the wonder right out of you and replaces it with the cheap substitutes of predictability, safety, and having things your way.

“They should’ve sent a poet.” Darn right, they should have. Never lose your sense of wonder.

And so we’ve arrived at a critical spot in our life together: our fortieth birthday, complete with a big bash later today after a year of special events leading up to it. We’re also at an interim period, a time between pastors. There’s a Self-Study committee hard at work, which will lead to the formation of a Pastor Nominating Committee sometime down the road, which will lead to the calling of a new permanent pastor.

These are exciting times, friends, and along with excitement there’s a level of anxiety and uncertainty as well. We wonder what’s ahead, but it’s the kind of wonder that’s born of worry.

What does the future hold?

There’ve been so many changes, with more to come.

Will it matter that I’m here?

Will we ever get the energy back that we used to have?

In the few months that I’ve been with you I’ve been amazed at what you’ve got going on here.

- You have an outstanding location, the center of pretty much everything.
- Your building is superbly designed and well maintained.
- Your music program is second to none for a church this size, and even larger.
- You have a heart for mission that is touching lives, internationally as well as here at home.

- That playground out back is a treasure.
- And look at the young people with whom you've been blessed.

Here's the problem. All of that good stuff will do you precious little good without your being anchored in the person of Jesus Christ.

We have something that no other organization on the planet can claim. Without him we're just another service club or community organization.

That's what makes one line from our Old Testament reading so very special:

Come and see what God has done. (Psalm 66:5)

It's an invitation. The writer was so convinced and convicted of what was happening that it had to be shared. His sense of wonder was in high gear.

Friends, you hold the key to the future of this church. You are not the victim of demographic trends or societal shifts, or whatever else there may be at hand. This church will grow when you grow, when you allow yourself to be renewed and refreshed by the Christ who is as timely as your latest twitter feed and as relevant as a CNN home page.

This church will grow when the world around us sees something in us that is so compelling that they have to come and see what God is up to.

This church does not exist to pay the bills, keep the doors open and maintain a building. You and I do not come together to form our own little social group and keep things the way they've always been. We come together in praise of the God who makes all things new, especially humankind. Nothing comes before Jesus. He is the beginning, the end, and everything in between. It's the one non-negotiable. Everything else is a means to an end.

The message does not change. It's the same as it was 40 years ago. How that message gets communicated must be relevant, refreshing, captivating and real.

The church is the hope of the world because the church serves the Light of the world.

How can we do it better? How can we sharpen our focus, broaden our outreach, and become even more contagious than the latest flu virus?