

“We Love to Tell the Story: God’s Never Ending Love Story”

Psalm 78 & John 1:1

Psalm 78

(Psalms for Praying - Nan C. Merrill)

Listen well, O peoples of the earth, to inner promptings of the Spirit;
Let Silence enter your house that you may hear.
For within your heart Love speaks; not with words of deceit,
but of spiritual truths to guide you upon the paths of peace.
Do not hide this from your children; teach of the inward Voice,
and help all generations to listen in the Silence,
That they may know the Beloved and be free
to follow the precepts of Love.

Psalm 78:2,3

I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings from of old,
things that we have heard and known,
that our ancestors have told us.

John 1:1-5

IN THE BEGINNING there was the Word; the Word was in God’s presence, and the Word was God. The Word was present to God from the beginning Through the Word all things came into being, and apart from the Word nothing came into being that has come into being. In the Word was life, and that life was humanity’s light— a Light that shines in the darkness, a Light that the darkness has never overtaken.

In 1969, the duet of Zager and Evans sang a song, one you might recall: “In the Year 2525:” <https://youtu.be/zKQfxi8V5FA>

In the year 2525
If man is still alive
If woman can survive
They may thrive...

Through his lyrics, songwriter, Rick Evans, took us on a journey into the future all way until 9595, asking us to consider what humanity might look like in the coming centuries as technology takes over.

Thinking about the changes in technology since these 2 first sang their 1969 hit song is mind-blowing.

Transportation, communication, entertainment, science, sports, education, groceries, shopping, medicine and health care, all have changed over the past century thanks to technology.

We now have smart cars that can drive and park themselves. You no longer have to dial a rotary phone or carry change for the payphone, just pull out your smartphone and you can video chat with family and friends all around the world, Zoom into a meeting, or simply make a phone call.

By the way, does anyone want my 8-track cassettes? How about some CDs?

With so many changes having taken place, we have to ask, what will the future "Church" look like in the coming years?

We know what church has looked like in our life-time. Each of us can think about to our childhood days, remembering lessons from Sunday school or songs from Vacation Bible School up until today.

We look around the sanctuary which is filled with memories of those who use to worship and serve beside us.

Many of us can remember when Sunday mornings were for going to church, businesses were closed and churches were full and "blue laws" were on the books.

But that was then, and this is now or as Bob Dylan sang, "Times, they are a changin' " Sundays are no longer reserved for church activities, nor are Wednesday evenings for that matter. People no longer feel compelled to attend church every Sunday morning. Stores are open on Sundays. So are entertainment venues. Kids play sports all weekend long, as do adults. And if they aren't playing a sport, they are home watching them with their family and friends.

Sunday morning isn't what it use to be for many of us. Even our own worship habits have changed, and we like the freedom to attend when we please and not feel pressured to do so.

And yet inspire of all of these changes, Sunday morning is still thought of as the only time for worship. The doors will be open to welcome whoever happens to be available to come on that particular Sunday.

So we print the bulletins, trying to guess how many to make for those who might show up on any given Sunday morning.

Then this pandemic hit, and things changed overnight. Faith communities of all traditions who had never considered using any form of technology in worship, scrambled to purchase technology so they could live-stream or record a worship service to share with their members.

Pastors took crash courses in film editing. Musicians learned to record music in advance. Choir members discovered creative ways to record an anthem from their homes, editing each part together to make a whole song. People learned to Zoom-in for worship or tune-in for a live-streamed service on Facebook or YouTube.

Worship services were shortened to accommodate our limited attention spans.

And here we are this morning still trying to adjust to the multitude of changes, and not always liking them.

Mark Touhey, jokingly told me that the reason he retired from teaching he couldn't keep up with the changes in classroom technology. He knew it was time to retire when they took away his chalkboard and replaced it with a whiteboard.

There are those in the church who feel the same way about any changes to their worship space, the worship order, or church music.

You might recall that old song, "Old Time Religion" that went like this, **"Give me that old time religion, it was good for Paul and Silas, it was good for the Hebrew people, it was good for my mother and father, and it's good enough for me."** And don't you change a thing about it.

The truth be told, how people have worshipped from the time of Abraham through Jesus and Paul, up until today, has been constantly changing with the times.

As we talked about last Sunday, worship spaces have changed. As those sacred spaces evolved, so did the way people worshipped.

There was a time when there were no pews, people just stood for a service. There was no music, and then instruments were introduced, and finally the organ was invented and introduced into worship.

With the advent of the radio and television, how people worshipped began to change once more.

During my last year of seminary, the first personal computers were being brought to campus by the incoming students. I had always typed my papers, but now a woman in my second student pastorate volunteered to type my senior thesis on their new Apple computer! No more whiteout!

And look at me here today, using my Apple laptop, iPad, and iPhone for worship. I could even have you watch the latest Ted Lasso episode on Apple TV!

Staci's one congregation, Glenwood Moravian, with a church membership about our size, just spent \$16,000 on upgrading their technology and training people to use it. Westminster Presbyterian in Madison, who as their pastor, Scott Anderson told me, had long resisted any type of technology in their sanctuary, were forced to reconsider. They now have the equipment and trained individuals to use it so they can continue to worship in this new day and age.

Why? Because those two congregations, like many others, understand, that while the story we love to tell is the same, the way, where, when, and how we tell it is evolving.

Rev. Colin Mathewson, in a recent article in Sojourners magazine, the online addition, says of the changes we are facing in the church: "Each generation is called to take what we've received from the past and to make it new, and to make it enthralling and compelling with God's help in this new time and place. That's a difficult task, especially when things are changing so fast. And each generation has its own different and sometimes almost mutually contradictory needs and expectations. It's complicated. I think the more that we can be nimble, smaller and start to be more creative on the backend, the church is going to be healthier. It's hard to know what the church needs, what the world needs right now. It's hard to sustain hope. People in the church and the leaders are struggling with that. We're humans that have these spiritual longings, the need for God, the need to wrestle with life's great questions will always be there." (Even when a church may no longer be around) (quoted in Sojourners magazine - "Rewriting the Script by Christina Colon)

My summer sermon series was inspired by the banner that hangs above the front stain glass window - "We Love To Tell The Story".

Generations of faithful people who have sought to follow Christ and worship God, have loved to tell that same story, though each in their own, creative way for their own times.

This is our time, and it is a challenging one for us. What is the best, most creative way for us to continue to tell the story, so that future generations will not only know it, but live into it, long after we who are the church now, are no more?

"The grass withers, the flowers fade, churches close, but the Word of the Lord, which is the story of God's undying Love for all creation, lasts forever."
Amen.