

From the Director

Rewards

During our pastoral staff retreat last week we studied Matthew chapter 6, the center of the Sermon on the Mount. This coming winter the evening services will focus on The Lord's Prayer (at the heart of the chapter at the center of the sermon) as part of our year-long focus on prayer. So it was good to spend time together studying, discussing and praying through this chapter.

A lot of our conversation had to do with the concept of "reward." On the first day it dominated discussion. Jesus says in Matthew 6:1 *for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.* And in verse 4, *And your father who sees in secret will reward you.* And not only here in the first paragraph of the chapter (regarding giving alms), but also in subsequent paragraphs, regarding prayer and fasting. Again, assuming that "treasures" has something to do with reward. And maybe too at the end of the chapter when Jesus promises that "all these things will be added to you."

The idea of rewards in the Christian life, the spiritual life, tends to make us uncomfortable. But it is clear that rewards are in view, on offer, and not to be ignored. So, what are the rewards, and when do we receive them? Ah, now there's the rub! You would be encouraged—and perhaps amused, too—to hear your pastors grapple with those issues.

Me? I'm just raising the issue here to make application to our music-making. Perhaps later, and almost certainly in another venue, I shall be willing to declare myself on those questions.

In Matthew 6, Jesus says God will reward his disciples for their proper exercise of "righteousness." His words assume that those who follow him will engage in three practices of traditional Jewish piety: giving alms, praying, and fasting. He begins with a word of caution ... literally, a cautionary word: *Beware!* That grabs our attention; it pulls us back from careless reading and especially from thoughtless application.

Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from

your Father who is in heaven. Jesus then addresses how we are to do the right things in the right way. And in alms-giving, prayer and fasting it is all the same: don't do these things before others for the purpose of being seen by them. The context is clear—"being seen" implies being recognized and praised for these good things. Instead, do them in a way that brings no attention to yourself; guard your heart in doing good; do good only for the purpose of pleasing God.

A few corollary verses help here:

Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matt. 5:16) *Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.* (Gal. 6:9-10) We are to do for others, not for the good we may receive from them, but so that they will see and acknowledge God's glory. Do good only expecting his reward.

I think this has a clear and unique analogy to making music for Christian worship. Especially in worship spaces like ours, musicians are very visible. Say all we like, we can't help but "draw attention to ourselves" when we play and sing on an elevated platform in a well-lit room while other people sit and watch and listen. Jesus' caution probably ought to be painted on the back of the choir loft doors: *Beware!* It is all too easy for us to get our reward immediately from the people who attend services here. We can't help being seen; we can't even help being praised when we do particularly well.

Our test, though, is clear in Matthew 6. For whom are we making music? People are present, but we desire to be seen by God for whom we have prepared and to whom ultimately we offer these gifts. The human rewards (compliments, repeat engagements on the schedule, etc.) have their satisfactions, but they are short-lived. The reward from God certainly has some immediacy, but even greater long-term and eternal significance ... whatever it is! It comes back to the heart. And I am thankful to see how the music ministry heart beats in this regard as you all

Sing on!

Chuck

Calendar Corner:

Sunday, November 11— morning services: Chancel Choir

Sunday, November 18— morning services: Chancel Choir

Sunday, November 18— 3pm concert series, reception following: Peter Bannister, organ

Wednesday, November 21—7pm Thanksgiving service: Chancel Choir

THE PRAYER COLUMN
LEE HOFFNER, CHOIR CHAPLAIN

Technology and the People of God

My job, as is true with most of you, involves heavy use of technology. In conversations with one of my good friends, we have often discussed the fact that technology often creates more problems than it solves. Robert Alter, Professor of Hebrew and Comparative Literature at UC-Berkeley, makes an interesting observation re: the use of technology in the day of Saul, king of Israel:

“Biblical views about post-mortem existence tend to fluctuate... Sometimes, the dead are imagined as continuing a kind of shadowy afterlife in the underworld, rather like the spirits of the dead in Book II of the Odyssey. Following on this... view, necromancy in the ancient Hebrew world is conceived not as mere hocus-pocus but as a potentially efficacious technology of the realm of spirits which, however, has been prohibited by God, Who wants no human experts interfering in this realm...”*

There has always been a “better way” offered to eager fans of new ways, by people who develop new systems of doing things. God knows that mortal man can cloud the truth of his gospel to the extreme when left to his own “devices”. How much worse, then, if man received the editorials available from beyond the grave, which by their mere availability would cast doubt about the sovereignty of God?

This was a problem in the ancient world and, to be sure, spiritualism is a problem today. The believer practices a monotheistic philosophy, saying, “There is one way and one Spirit I will follow and that is of the Lord God.” We pray and listen and conscientiously dedicate our sacrifices of praise to the Glory of God, the Only God; he who is called, “*I Am*”. We rely on no technology of the physical or the spiritual worlds to do this: rather, we depend on the *supernatural* effect of being a part of the One Body of Christ to unify our praise. When our efforts derive from this, how inevitable that God would be glorified!

As for whether you should use Instant Messaging, that's up to you.
Selah.

* *The David Story*, by Robert Alter; W.W. Norton & Co. pub. 1999

To include your new prayer requests, contact Chuck King (668-0878 x122; cdking@college-church.org).

Chancel Choir Rehearsal Music:

Voice-Building

Rehearsal directed by Greg Wheatley
Selections include Advent and Christmas music, plus the following November morning anthems:

Teach me the measure (Nov. 11)
Gloria Deo (Nov. 18)
You are the light (Nov. 25)
Rehearsal order TBA by the director

Choir Calendar

Long/late rehearsal on Thursday, Nov. 15
Wednesday, Nov. 21—Thanksgiving service
Long/late rehearsal on Thursday, Dec. 6
Sun., Dec. 9—*Service of Lessons & Carols*

Jubilation Bells Rehearsal

Wednesday 6:45 PM in the Choir Room
Bells play in services on
Sunday, November 25

Brass Ensemble Rehearsal
Ad hoc for the Fall season

String Ensemble Rehearsal
Ad hoc for now

Concert Series
College Church Sanctuary

November 18, 3:00 pm
Reception following the concert

Peter Bannister
Organist, Church of the Trinity (Paris)

Works by:
Bach and Messiaen
First American performance of a work
in three movements by Mr. Bannister
(Eli and Samuel, Ezekiel,
and the prayer of Jonah)