



Beverly Heights
Presbyterian
Church

scattered seeds.

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

December 2019



BY TOM O'BOYLE

IS HE WORTHY?

I know I speak for my mates in the choir when I say what a thrill it was to perform "Is He Worthy?" as the culmination of the Celebration of Worship service last month.

It's a magnificent piece not just for its musicality but its message, which perfectly captures a life of faith. The lyrics are printed on page 5 for your prayerful consideration.

As I prayed over the words of this powerful anthem, the beauty of our risen Lord was revealed to me.

The piece starts out somberly as it asks the

questions which obstruct one's belief. "Do you feel the world is broken? ... Do you feel the shadows deepen?"

Who among us has not felt the ravages of living in a fallen world? Bad things happen to us and sin resides within us.

Then, a threshold is crossed in the life of every believer, which the anthem majestically captures. "Does the Father truly love us? ... And does Jesus, our Messiah, hold forever those He loves?"

Is He indeed worthy? This is the paramount

question all followers of Christ ask at some point. If the answer is "yes," then nothing else matters. If the answer is "no," then nothing matters, as well.

What better way to end our year together than on this victorious note, amid the splendor of this Advent season, than by giving all honor to Him who is worthy? As we joyfully proclaim, to a fallen world, the anthem's triumphant answer ...

He is.



BY PASTOR NATE DEVLIN

WHY WE WORSHIP

At Beverly Heights we like to say, “Worship is job #1!”

That’s a bold statement. It is bold not only for us to hear as individual believers, as we seek to reconcile such a claim with all the responsibilities and opportunities we face each day; it is bold even for some churches.

You might be surprised to hear that not every church, or even every pastor, would affirm this statement. Others might

suggest that mission is job #1, or personal evangelism, outreach, church growth, even programming. To be sure, each of these are good things, important to the life and ministry of a local congregation, but none rise to the level of job #1.

Why does worship enjoy this superior position?

To answer that question, we must first understand the meaning of the word “worth.” The origin of the English word “worship” comes from the Old English word weorthscipe or worth•ship. The issue of worth is inherent in worship.

The reason something is worshiped is because that thing has a quality or condition of excellence that makes it valuable, desirable and esteemed. In short, something is worshiped because of its worth.

So now the question becomes, “How is

the worth of something defined?” Is worth arbitrary, placed upon a thing by someone or by the consensus of a group?

This may be true when we are talking about diamond rings or real-estate, but there is an aspect of worth that transcends personal opinion. Some things are intrinsically worthy and possess worth in and of themselves.

They are not worthy because of an extrinsic quality but simply because of what they are. People are intrinsically worthy. We love them (or should love them) for their own sake, not because of what they might bring to you.

The Bible reveals God in this same way. He is inherently valuable and intrinsically worthy. The Bible asks, “Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?” (Exodus 15:11).

The answer is that there is none other like

God. God is unique. He alone is holy. He alone reveals creative, redemptive and sustaining glory. God is good. In fact, God is the highest good. There is none higher. Therefore, God is worth everything. There is nothing more worth pursuing or more worthy of our worship.

HOW WE WORSHIP

What is our response to such a unique, powerful and perfect being? Our response is to worship Him, to ascribe all honor and worth to our Creator-God precisely because He is worthy, delightfully so.

Worship means that we recognize that God is #1 in every evaluation. He occupies the top place in every hierarchy of good things. Every time the church gathers together for corporate worship, we make a public declaration, to ourselves, to the world and even to heaven, and declare that God is worth everything, including our lives.

The Bible not only declares that God is worthy of worship; it also describes how we should engage in worship. There is a biblical design to worship we follow, which is why we are committed not only to singing and music, but also the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments.

That is also why we have a Worship Design Team; a team that helps our church to discern that pattern and follow it.

I serve on the Worship Design Team, along with Elissa Winkler, Cindy Egeland, Joe Williams and Kevin Tan. This team is

extremely talented and faithfully committed to worship, as well as leading according to the biblical design.

Each week we meet for over two hours on Thursday mornings to review last week and get ready for the next. On Thursday nights the team helps run rehearsal for both our New Worship and Morning Worship services.

We are joined by many volunteers who offer their gifts. Some serve in both services and so they can spend over three hours here on a Thursday night getting ready for the Lord’s day. Preparing for worship takes a lot of time and requires a lot of attention, but God is worth it because God’s worth is transcendent and exceeds all things.

When we read Revelation chapter 5, we hear all of Heaven ask the question, “Who is worthy?” Who is worthy of blessing, honor, glory and might? Who is worthy of our worship? The answer, “He is!” Amen.



ELISSA WINKLER

In little more than one year on the staff of Beverly Heights Church, Elissa has demonstrated great musical gifts while sharing her personal story. In the recently released Episode 15 of our podcast, she offers powerful testimony of the Lord's faithfulness amid the pregnancy and passing of her son, Isaiah.

Since becoming Director of Music in Worship in August of 2018, she has juggled the purchase of a new Steinway piano; taken on the rebuilding of our organ; assisted Pastor Nate in combining the New Worship and Morning Worship design teams into one group; augmented our children's music ministries; and orchestrated last month's tremendous Celebration of Worship service. Elissa and husband Chad, who plays trumpet in the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, and children Hudson and Selah, live nearby on Hoodridge Drive in Mt. Lebanon.

WHAT'S BEEN THE BIGGEST SURPRISE IN YOUR FIRST YEAR HERE?

How well suited I am for this job. While many days I am stretched and challenged, I've been amazed how perfectly my education and experiences, as well as my personality, prepared me for a job that spans both my musical and interpersonal skills. This realization has helped to reaffirm what I believe was a calling to serve the church through this ministry.

HOW HAVE YOU COPED WITH ALL THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS JOB?

A lot of deep breaths! Focusing on whichever task is at hand, but above all, leaning on the entire staff leadership team. There isn't a single ministry at Beverly Heights that would be successful without the discourse, interplay and support among staff members. We work as a unit.

HOW HAVE PEOPLE BEEN BROUGHT CLOSER TO GOD THROUGH YOUR ACTIVITIES?

A member of the choir shared a comment from a little girl: "I sing so I can hear God!" The choir person shared how it helped her remember times when she was experiencing trials. How the anthems we sang helped her to pray; to remember God's promises; and to see the Holy Spirit at work in her life.

Among children, part of the heritage Mary Wolling established was teaching the great hymns of the faith to children in New Song Choir. I have continued to teach the hymns of the faith. Last year I shared some of the more incredible stories associated with these hymns and hymn writers such as Horatio Spafford, Phillip Bliss, John Newton and Fanny Crosby. Through these stories they've learned how God uses regular people and how they trusted God. It is the highlight of my week to watch as the hearts and minds of the children embrace gospel truth and personal application through these stories. Every class someone asks, "Please tell us another hymn story today!"

HOW HAS THE POSITION MINISTERED TO YOU?

I have learned what it is to feel the Lord's pleasure when one is obedient to a calling. I have found healing through being within this community and the music that we plan and put forth. While I was freshly grieving the loss of our son even when I accepted this position, God brought about a joy in my life in the midst of it. Again, there is nothing like the sense of peace you have through obedience to the Lord.

WHAT NEW INITIATIVES DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN 2020?

I plan to continue to live out my calling: facilitating the music in our services by helping those who participate in the music ministry be successful. In terms of programming, in addition to keeping the Men's Chorale alive (and maybe adding a Women's Chorus in the Spring!), I would love to see another evening like "He Is Worthy." I'd also like to grow His Song, the new teen choir we launched this fall, and perhaps bring back the Family Talent Show of years past.

IS HE WORTHY?

BY ANDREW PETERSON AND BEN SHIVE

ARRANGED BY DAN FORREST

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain."

Do you feel the world is broken? We do.
Do you feel the shadows deepen? We do.
But do you know that all the dark
Won't stop the light from getting through? We do.

Do you wish that you could see it all made new? We do.

Is all creation groaning? It is.
Is a new creation coming? It is.
Is the glory of the Lord to be the light within our midst? It is.
Is it good that we remind ourselves of this? It is.

Is anyone worthy? Is anyone whole?
Is anyone able to break the seal and open the scroll?
The Lion of Judah who conquered the grave,
He is David's Root, and the Lamb who died to ransom the slave.
Is He worthy? Is He worthy? Of all blessing and honor and glory?
Is He worthy of this? He is.

Does the Father truly love us? He does.
Does the Spirit move among us? He does.
And does Jesus, our Messiah, hold forever those He loves? He does.
Does our God intend to dwell again with us? He does.

From ev'ry people and tribe, every nation and tongue,
He has made us a kingdom and priests to God,
to reign with the Son.

Is He worthy? Is He worthy? Of all blessing and honor and glory?
Is He worthy of this? He is.



HOUSES OF WORSHIP

The Historical Society of Mount Lebanon's new exhibit, "Houses of Worship in Mt. Lebanon," is now open to the public. Beverly Heights and 14 other congregations have lent 175 artifacts, documents, and photographs to tell their stories to visitors. The exhibit is open on Wednesday and Sunday from 1:00 until 4:00 p.m. and Saturday from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. The exhibit will remain open to the public through January at least.

If you have groups in your congregation that might like to schedule a visit outside of regular hours, please contact Mike Cahall, the society's president.

412-329-8595
hsmtlebo@gmail.com



BETWEEN | SUNDAYS

BY RICK WOLLING

The First Noel, my favorite carol

The Advent and Christmas seasons are ones of great wonder. The mystery of the incarnation – the eternal God taking on human flesh and being born in Bethlehem long years ago – prompts deep, even mystical, contemplations on the very mind and purposes of God.

The prophetic predictions, the years of waiting, the watching and longing for the Messiah's advent, fill us with joyous anticipation for both the current celebration of His first coming and His imminent return, perhaps in our own day.

Added to the reflections on these deep matters is our participation in rich and beloved seasonal traditions. The lighting of the Advent star, Advent Family Celebration and Vespers, along with the Christmas Eve Candlelight Service, contribute to the warmth of what is without doubt my favorite season of the church year.

The question most often put to me during Advent is: "Why do we always sing 'The First Noel' on Christmas Eve, and why do we always sing all six verses?"

The simple answer, I suppose, is pastoral prerogative.

Though disdained by some as insufficiently orthodox, it's my favorite Christmas carol. First published in 1833, it's a traditional English carol though it was sung at Christmas long before it found its way into print.

Singing "The First Noel" on Christmas Eve is a little gift I gave myself for over 40 years. Throughout the church year I chose hymns



to be sung that corresponded to sermon topics, the church calendar and requests of congregation members. It's selfish, I know, but on Christmas Eve we sing a hymn with a tag that reads, "To Rick from Rick!" and it's a tradition Pastor Nate continues.

Which begs the question as to why it is my favorite carol. One reason has to do with the music and singing of the carol.

Think of the refrain "Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel; born is the King of Israel." As we sing the third and the fourth noels of the refrain, the bass part (which I typically sing) climbs up the scale with the tenor part doing the same, yet one third higher in harmony.

This crescendo in volume and tone is majestic, and part of the joy of Christmas Eve is singing that two-measure duet with my choir mate, David Caldwell, each year. Then there's the David Willcocks soprano descant and the alternate harmonization from the organ on verse 6 that is reminiscent of the angelic natal announcement – heavenly! But the real reason it's my favorite is that it

tells the story of Jesus' birth. The word "noel" derives from a Latin root meaning "birth" and comes to us through the French title word; hence, the "first birth." The text is founded upon the account of Jesus' birth recorded in Luke chapter 2.

Storytelling is an important part of worship and of our growth in faith. One of the oft used words in the Bible is "remember." Our faith is founded upon historical events that can be verified and it is important to rehearse those events which we do every time

we sing of the angels, shepherds, Bethlehem, the star and wise men.

Which also explains why we sing all six verses. You have to sing the entire carol to remember and celebrate the entire story. And you have to sing the first five verses in order to get to verse 6, which is a call to worship, the only response that makes sense in the light of the majesty and glory of the Son of God taking on flesh for us and for our salvation.

*Then let us all with one accord
sing praises to our heavenly Lord*

*That hath made heaven and earth of naught
and with His blood mankind hath bought.*

*Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,
born is the King of Israel.*

Rick Wolling is pastor emeritus of Beverly Heights Presbyterian Church. As such, what better person to explain why his favorite Christmas carol is not among those found in our pew hymnals.