San Diego Pipe Organ Encounter 2017

“Dimensions of Praise: The Organ in Worship”

Sermon Reflection

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*Note: This was the talk I prepared for presentation to the POE students at the Wednesday afternoon worship experience. Throughout the week, they heard many organs playing many kinds of literature. To round out our understanding of the many roles the organ plays, I thought it was important for everyone to think about how the organ connects with worship and how playing the organ is connected with the vocation of sacred musician*. *I hope my thoughts are helpful to you.*

“It’s a Mystery to Me”

If you don’t know how it works, say “It’s a mystery to me!”

Electricity

Airplanes

Electoral College

Toilets

Love

Some people are curious, and others just benefit from the product. Are you curious?

The organ is a mystery to most folks, maybe it was to you. But now, each day you are getting a clearer picture of how it works. Just because you are learning about it doesn’t make it any the less interesting, right?

Look up at this organ. How beautiful it is. There are the pipes, you know how the wind works in them, some of you even know how the trackers work to start the sound. You know a lot about it now! But we don’t know everything yet.

But even if we understand everything about the organ, there remains a mystery: music. How does music work? Teachers and performers here have spend their lives delving into learning how music works. You are learning some of our insights, and soon, you will have your own insights to share. One thing that we all share is, the more deeply we get into the way music works, the more we realize what a mystery it is.

We realize that there is something behind music that inspires its creation and makes it “go.” What is it about music that moves us and excites us? How does it do that? The spirit of music is its energy, the many different moods it projects, its character. When we listen to music, we are changed. We are encouraged, we are thrilled. Literally, we “en-joy” music.

It’s our job as musicians to bring music into the world. The best musicians are partners with the music they make.

The spirit that makes music is just one part of a larger world of spirit: art, literature, drama, dance, movies. Even this week’s Comic Con is a convention devoted to a shared spirit of fun and adventure. All these art forms are part of a larger spiritual world that eventually grows to include everything that exists, whether you can see it or not. No one really can totally understand how it all works. Truly, when it comes to the universe, “It’s a mystery” to all of us! When we get to that all inclusive point, when we ponder the spirit that moves the world, we call that mystery, “God.”

We are invited to participate in the mystery of God. That is what worship is all about. Worship is accepting the invitation to enter into the mystery of God. We do that in many ways. We designed this service to show the five main ways of encountering God in God’s mystery and how the organ helps us to connect with God. I hope you will notice how the organ uplifts and reinforces the experience of:`

* Praise: Wow! Hooray!
* Adoration: Welcome!
* Confession: I’m sorry!
* Supplication: Help!
* Thanksgiving: Thanks!

Frankly, the mystery we encounter in worship is too vague and distant for most of us to grasp. People really need help in grasping onto the Mystery, and music is one of the best ways of communicating about it. In the deepest of ways, music helps us connect with it. The profession of SacredMusician is ancient and biblical: the most famous psalmist was King David. The psalms he wrote were used in the national worship center of the Hebrew people in Jerusalem. As sacred musicians, we follow in his footsteps.We dedicate ourselves to using our musical tools to help people understand a little more about God.

Sacred musicians combine our study of music with our study of theology, the ways of God. At its deepest level, music itself is a tool, a way of learning more about God. All of us still have much to learn, so we keep practicing our art. The art of music—expressing the mystery of God in sound. We will never be able to grasp all that it means, so may we always be able to say in the best of ways, “It’s a mystery to me!”

One of the great mysteries of spirit is the presence of peace in the world. How does it emerge out of all the chaos? What does it have to offer us? Let’s reflect on how this piece of music brings some peace to us this afternoon. Segue to Dr. Nicole, “The Peace May Be Exchanged.”