

Series: For All the Saints
Sermon: Johann Bach

II Chronicles 5:1-2, 4-7, 10-14 (NIV)

When all the work Solomon had done for the temple of the Lord was finished, he brought in the things his father David had dedicated—the silver and gold and all the furnishings—and he placed them in the treasuries of God’s temple. Then Solomon summoned to Jerusalem the elders of Israel, all the heads of the tribes and the chiefs of the Israelite families, to bring up the ark of the Lord’s covenant from Zion, the City of David.

When all the elders of Israel had arrived, the Levites took up the ark, and they brought up the ark and the tent of meeting and all the sacred furnishings in it. The Levitical priests carried them up; and King Solomon and the entire assembly of Israel that had gathered about him were before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and cattle that they could not be recorded or counted.

The priests then brought the ark of the Lord’s covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim.

There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets that Moses had placed in it at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the Israelites after they came out of Egypt.

The priests then withdrew from the Holy Place. All the priests who were there had consecrated themselves, regardless of their divisions. All the Levites who were musicians—Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun and their sons and relatives—stood on the east side of the altar, dressed in fine linen and playing cymbals, harps and lyres. They were accompanied by 120 priests sounding trumpets. The trumpeters and musicians joined in unison to give praise and thanks to the Lord. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, the singers raised their voices in praise to the Lord and sang:

“He is good;
his love endures forever.”

Then the temple of the Lord was filled with the cloud, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the temple of God.

Sermon

Here we are, at the end of the Christian Year. Happy New Christian Year! What? I can see the question in your eyes. End of the Christian year? Don’t we have like another month left? Yes, and no. There are specific times in the Christian year. The Christian year starts with Advent (Next Sunday). Preparing for the birth of Christ. Then we have Christmastide, maybe a few weeks of ordinary time before we get into Lent - preparing for Easter. After Easter, we have Eastertide. Which flows into Pentecost. And then in the summer and fall we get some more Ordinary time. But through ordinary time, we are to follow the life and teachings of Jesus. And at the end of it, we have this month where we celebrate the saints and we close it out with Christ the King Sunday - where we are today. We began the Christian year with preparing for the baby savior, in the middle we learn about Christ and what it means to follow him, and we end it with the understanding that Christ is King. King of the Universe, King of Creation, King of our hearts. And next week, we’ll begin the progression again

with the waiting for a baby. So, tell you neighbor, Happy Christ the King Sunday. But that progression is there - waiting for the help of a Savior, learning about faithful discipleship, and thanksgiving for God's gifts.

Today, we're finishing up a month-long look at a few of the saints within our faith tradition. More specifically, I shared with you the scripture verses that have shaped their lives, the essence of who they are. These folk had one or two scripture verses that have molded them into the people that they were. It became their mantra, their motto, their entire being. And so it is with the saint we have today. Just to clarify, for us, a saint is someone in the faith - Our ancestors were saints. You're a saint, I'm a saint. We share the faith. In the New Testament, Saint and believer are the same thing. So who is our Saint today? Johann Sabastian Bach was a musician, not a martyr. He grew up in the 1700's in Lepzig, Germany, a place of relative peace and quiet. His Germany went through trials two hundred years prior with Martin Luther bolting from the Catholic Church, but by now, being a music director of a church was a good thing, not something to frown upon. Bach grew up in a musical family. Even before Johann, the Bach family was always known for music. As far back up the family tree you could go, there was a musician in the family. In the town he grew up in, every musician was called a "Bach", regardless of their true name, even before Johann became a superstar. Bach's early life wasn't the easiest. At the age of 10, his parents had both died. He was taken in by his older brother Christopher, who was another promising musician. But Johann could easily play everything that his older brother could master. And Johann wanted more to learn. At night, Johann would sneak into the bookshelf where the good stuff was, the music of the masters of those days, and he would copy the book by moonlight (not candlelight) so he would have his own music to play when his brother wasn't around. For six months he did this, when the moon was available. One night his brother did catch him, and Johann was forced to burn everything he had done thus far. It wasn't really out of jealousy, but more out of wanting Johann to learn how to play and compose correctly. But out of his midnight jaunts came the desire to know more, and the melodies and harmonies filled his soul. He learned how to make music move people. That is the true desire of any artist - to change the recipient in some way. And music has that ability to change us. Why do you think we listen to the radio or to our Ipod? Because the music stirs something deep inside us. Why do we spend billions on CD's or itunes? Why do we hum or whistle or have a tune going through our heads? Because it moves us. One of my fears is that we will forget how to make music, and just be music consumers. Where music is something you buy, not what you make. Where we don't perform it, where we don't sing it, where we don't experience it except in listening it from others, or from the jeep next to you as your car shakes. If music is from the soul, then you are depriving your soul if you don't participate in the music other than the ears. Bach learned about music because he lived it out. And for his entire career, he would use music to touch others. He had many jobs and many different performances, but some things always remained the same. Before he would start any new piece of music, he would write two small words up on the top of the page. Jesu Juva. Jesus, help me. The master. So here is one who could write musical circles around anybody - the most highly trained musician in the most highly-cultured nation. Jesus, help me. And I think to myself, what kind of help did he need? He didn't need anybody's help! Translate it to other professions! Imagine if Neil DeGrass Tyson went to his telescope and prayed, "Jesus, help me see the stars." Or Tom Brady: "Jesus, help me pass the ball today." Or Katy Perry, "Jesus, help me stay in tune today." It's for granted! Imagine if you went to a U2 concert, and Bono said, "I hope I can tell the difference between a guitar and a drum". Duh! To have the master say, Jesus help me, is almost ludicrous in this day and age. That is what humility is all about. Humility isn't putting yourself down, as some might imagine, it's just not thinking too highly of yourself. You can be great and humble at the same time.

Bach would say that all true music comes from the Book of II Chronicles out of the Old Testament. It's a very boring book to read, to be honest, because most of it is names and who descended from who and so forth. But in between the names you get some wonderful golden nuggets of drama. The time was 900's B.C. That's almost 3,000 years ago. King David had reigned in the kingdom of Israel for 40 years. His son Solomon had just began his reign. For hundreds of years at that time, they celebrated their history of getting out of slavery in Egypt. They remember the ancient story of Moses leading them out into the promised land, and along the 40

year journey, they had the tent where they worshiped. Moses brought down the ark with the 10 commandments, and they placed it in an ark, a small golden box. That was their alter. The Ark of the Covenant. Now, skip ahead 400-500 years. Solomon, in the comforts of a palace, decides it's time to build a Temple. He didn't have to, he was secure in his wealth. But he build's a Temple, a church if you will, to house the old relic, the aged ark. It was in a little tent outside of Jerusalem. Not a place of honor at all. David had searched it out, actually, years before. They had to ask around to see who had it, it had been so long. They found it pretty much abandoned in the town of Shechem, out in the middle of nowhere. So Solomon built the temple and brought in the Ark with a lot of fanfare, and I would imagine that they were surprised to see what happened! A cloud filled the Temple - just like the days of old. They may have thought it was all just stories and exaggeration. All of the musicians who were playing were filled with awe and wonder! And the musicians couldn't play because they were so moved with reverence and worship. Solomon didn't have to build a temple, and he thought he was just moving an old box into a new building. But when you deal with God, amazing things begin to happen.

Bach wrote his music for just that purpose. It wasn't just a melody. It wasn't just counter-point, it was worship. It was where the presence of God could be felt. And if you do it with faith, you can transcend into something holy. After Bach's death, his music disappeared from the scene. No one would remember his name. Let me say that again: For several generations, no one ever heard of Bach. He was no longer famous - but forgotten. Seventy-five years later, a young Felix Mendolson was looking for a piece for his orchestra. For 75 years, no one heard a Bach piece. In 1829, Mendolson's orchestra and chorus performed "The Passion of St. Matthew." For most of a century, Bach had not been performed. People were led to Christ following that performance by Mendolson. Today, we are hearing the same story. In Japan, a culture that is largely anti-Christian, Bach's music is finding a revival. They love him over there. And through his music, countless Japanese are finding the message of Christ touching their lives as well. Today, the number one cause of Christian conversion in Japan is through Bach. Not missionaries, not Bibles, but music. Even 250 years after his death, Bach is still influencing people because of his art. Because of his work, Bach is sometimes referred to as the Fifth Evangelist. The first four being, Matthew Mark Luke and John. His music is sometimes called the fifth Gospel.

And if you look at the end of all of Bach's musical scores, when he was finished, he would write S. D. G. Soli Deo Gloria. To God be the Glory. May our lives have the same progression as Johann Bach and our Christian Calendar. First, Jesus help us. Second, may our lives be filled with music and song. And third, when our lives are complete and the final stories are being told, may we be able to say of our life, To God be the Glory. Happy Christ the King Sunday. Soli Deo Gloria. To God be the Glory. And the family of God said, Amen!