

Do We Have A Voice? Wayne Benson, 6-29-20

With all the comments on the subject, I'm reluctant to add another. As tragic as the pandemic is, one of the most valuable lessons for the church is that The Church is not a building but a body of redeemed believers. Many churches that, pre-pandemic, had not invested in technology for livestreaming, now see the value in advancing their gospel presentation outside the walls of their building. Others who had previously invested in the technology began to realize the value of online venues and platforms and have refined that presence, developing a regular audience and garnering new listeners. All good! We're discovering that the "whosoever will" online may range from the reluctant watcher who is trying to decide whether he/she is ready to respond...to the employee who is desperate for Sunday morning church but never able to attend...to the one who is shut-in because of age or illness.

Having said that, there is no substitute for believers gathering together – whether under a roof or a sky is irrelevant. The "group" matters. *Koinonia* is important. The word "together" is replete throughout the Book of Acts. Things happened in The Upper Room that couldn't have happened otherwise. There is the power of "critical mass" when "it seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us." Singing or praying with a computer screen just isn't the same as being in a chorus of voices together. Not to mention the fellowship of handshakes and hugs (which may not show up for a while) or the laying on of hands to pray for the sick. Faith has no walls, and there is no distance in prayer. But the power of an energized, participating, engaged congregation cannot be duplicated online.

With that premise, we cannot be controlled by a fear *modus operandi* as we ponder the reopening of our gathered church. Of course, we need to be sensitive to protective guidelines to keep our congregation safe. But the value of gathering the church "together" must be weighed against the risks of "staying safe at home." Personally, I'm growing weary of all the TV commercials that comfort us as we stay at home. When I think of the risk of life or imprisonment endured by believers under severe persecution – that risk set aside to worship together underground – it increases my faith that regathering is not just an option decided by the CDC or a political leader. When I think of the Early Church being threatened not to preach or teach in the name of Jesus, when they "came again to their own company," they were unified in prayer together to advance the cause of Christ with greater boldness.

The church has a greater voice when we're "one." We've marched around the walls seven times in silence...perhaps it's time to raise our voices together. Does the church have something to say about racism? Does the Word have anything to say about anarchy and rebellion against authority? What about violence... rioting... looting... stealing... killing? Does God have a voice? Apparently the pandemic faded into oblivion and all risk tossed aside by those who wanted to raise their voices in the streets because they had "a cause"...confused though it was.

I'm reminded of the riot in Acts 19:29-32. The whole city of Ephesus "was filled with confusion" as a flood of new believers were now questioning the idol worship of Diana. How ironic the parallel to today as "some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly was in confusion and the majority did not know for what reason they had come together." Apparently, the atmosphere was so perilous that the disciples urged Paul not to go – due to the risk on his life. But one man, a town-clerk...a single voice... managed to quiet the crowd and provided a cohesive argument to stop the riot. There is no indication that he was a believer – but he was a voice.

We who have been called to preach have a voice. And we speak not out of our own spirit, nor even our own initiative, but by the power of the Holy Spirit to declare God's Word. This is a holy calling. Lives are transformed by the power of God's Word faithfully delivered. The atmosphere changes when darkness encounters light! Entire countries have been impacted by worldwide revivals...mighty moves of God...great awakenings!

It matters little that our stage presentation or online presence is perfected and promoted if we have no voice. Yes, we need the "presence" of our gatherings. Yes, we need the technology to speak beyond our church walls. Body-life...outreach...we need it all! But do we have something to say? Do we have a voice? Is there fire in our bones? And does the church itself speak with one voice like the clear sound of a trumpet – or that of noisy gongs and clanging cymbals?

Do we have a voice? Do we have His Voice?

Ps 29*

- 1 Ascribe to the LORD, O sons of the mighty,
Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
- 2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to His name;
Worship the LORD in holy array.
- 3 The voice of the LORD is upon the waters;
The God of glory thunders,
The LORD is over many waters.
- 4 The voice of the LORD is powerful,
The voice of the LORD is majestic.
- 5 The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
Yes, the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.
- 6 He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
And Sirion like a young wild ox.
- 7 The voice of the LORD hews out flames of fire.
- 8 The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;
The LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
- 9 The voice of the LORD makes the deer to calve
And strips the forests bare;
And in His temple everything says, "Glory!"
- 10 The LORD sat as *King* at the flood;
Yes, the LORD sits as King forever.

11 The LORD will give strength to His people;
 The LORD will bless His people with peace.