

Isaiah 40:1-11
December 13, '09

“ALL PEOPLE SHALL SEE TOGETHER”

(Before scripture)

DURING ADVENT THIS YEAR, WE'RE LOOKING AT PARTICULAR LINES IN SOME OF OUR FAVORITE HYMNS OF THE SEASON.

WE HAVE PREVIOUSLY LOOKED AT THE WORDS OF JOHN MASON NEALE & WILLIAM CHATTERTON DIX. TODAY, IT'S NOT AS SIMPLE AS SAYING “WE’LL LOOK AT THE WORDS OF SO-AND-SO,” BECAUSE THE WORDS THAT HAVE BEEN TURNED INTO A SONG ARE THE WORDS OF THE PROPHET ISAIAH.

THEY ARE WORDS THAT WERE CHOSEN BY A MAN NAMED CHARLES JENNENS.

THEY WERE CHOSEN TO BE SET TO THE MUSIC OF GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL’S “MESSIAH.”

OUR SCRIPTURE READING IS ISAIAH 40:1-11.

(After scripture)

AN ADVERTISEMENT IN IRELAND’S *DUBLIN JOURNAL* ON MARCH 27, 1742 READ:

‘FOR THE RELIEF OF THE PRISONERS IN THE SEVERAL JAILS AND FOR THE SUPPORT OF MERCER’S HOSPITAL IN STEPHEN’S STREET AND OF THE CHARITABLE INFIRMARY ON THE INN’S QUAY, ON MONDAY 12TH APRIL WILL BE PERFORMED AT THE MUSICK HALL IN FISHAMBLE STREET, MR. HANDEL’S NEW GRAND ORATORIO CALLED THE MESSIAH...’

THAT FIRST PERFORMANCE TOOK PLACE ON APRIL 13TH, ONE DAY LATER THAN ADVERTISED.

THERE WAS AN OVERFLOW CROWD – 700 IN A HALL WITH A CAPACITY DESIGNED TO HOLD ONLY 600.

THIS WAS ACHIEVED BY REQUESTING THE LADIES ATTENDING NOT TO WEAR HOOPS IN THEIR SKIRTS AND THE GENTLEMEN NOT TO BRING THEIR SWORDS.

THIS MORNING, SEEING NO HOOPS PRESENT & NO SWORDS – AT LEAST NONE THAT ARE VISIBLE – I CAN SEE THAT YOU HAVE ABIDED BY THIS TRADITION IN THE SAME WAY THAT YOU WILL LATER ABIDE BY THE TRADITION OF STANDING FOR THE “HALLELUJAH” CHORUS.

THE TRADITION OF STANDING DURING THE “HALLELUJAH” CHORUS BEGAN JUST A YEAR AFTER THAT FIRST PERFORMANCE.

KING GEORGE II WAS IN ATTENDANCE & WHEN THE “HALLELUJAH” CHORUS BEGAN , HE ROSE TO HIS FEET.

IT IS UNCLEAR WHY HE STOOD UP.

HE MAY HAVE BEEN STRETCHING HIS LEGS.

IT IS POSSIBLE THAT KING GEORGE, WHO WAS PARTIALLY DEAF, MISTOOK THE OPENING NOTES FOR THE NATIONAL ANTHEM OR HE MAY HAVE RISEN TO HIS FEET OUT OF RESPECT.

WE JUST DON’T KNOW.

BUT IT IS A TRADITION RELATED TO “MESSIAH” THAT LIVES ON.

PERHAPS YOU HAVE YOUR OWN TRADITION OR MEMORY RELATED TO THIS GREAT WORK.

MY FIRST REAL MEMORY OF "MESSIAH" IS FROM A CHRISTMAS DAY MANY YEARS AGO.

ON CHRISTMAS EVE, I REALIZED THAT I WOULD BE SPENDING CHRISTMAS ALONE WITH MY DOG, ROBERTO, NAMED AFTER THE GREAT OUTFIELDER, ROBERTO CLEMENTE.

I BOUGHT & WRAPPED A PRESENT FOR ROBERTO & A PRESENT FOR MYSELF.

ON CHRISTMAS MORNING, ROBERTO TORE INTO HIS PACKAGE & FOUND A NEW BONE.

I TORE INTO MINE & FOUND A 2-RECORD SET OF HANDEL'S "MESSIAH."

ROBERTO SPENT CHRISTMAS DAY CHEWING ON HIS BONE & I SPENT THE DAY LISTENING TO "MESSIAH."

IT'S A MEMORY I WILL ALWAYS CHERISH.

PERHAPS YOU HAVE YOUR OWN PERSONAL MEMORIES RELATED TO "MESSIAH."

I HOPE THE MEMORY OF TODAY'S EXPERIENCE WILL STAND ALONGSIDE SOME OF THOSE OTHER MEMORIES.

ON THE OTHER HAND, IF YOU *DON'T* HAVE SUCH MEMORIES, PERHAPS THIS WILL BE THE START OF MANY.

FOLLOWING THE FIRST PERFORMANCE OF "MESSIAH," THE DUBLIN JOURNAL CARRIED A REVIEW OF THE CONCERT, STATING THAT "*HANDEL'S 'MESSIAH' WAS ALLOWED BY THE GREATEST JUDGES TO BE THE FINEST COMPOSTION OF MUSICK THAT WAS EVER HEARD.*"

HANDEL WAS DEEPLY CONSCIOUS OF THE SPIRITUAL AS WELL AS MUSICAL VALUE OF HIS MASTERPIECE. SOMEONE ONCE OFFERED HIM A COMPLIMENT ON PRESENTING – AS THE PERSON PUT IT – "*A SPLENDID ENTERTAINMENT.*"

HANDEL'S RESPONSE WAS "*I WOULD BE SORRY IF I ONLY ENTERTAINED THEM; I WISH TO MAKE THEM BETTER.*"

OF COURSE, IT WOULD BE NICE IF THAT WERE THE EXPERIENCE WE HAD EVERY SUNDAY WHEN WE ATTENDED WORSHIP – THAT WE WERE MADE BETTER BECAUSE OF IT.

OPEN YOUR HEART THIS MORNING & SEE IF THE EFFORTS OF THE PROPHET ISAIAH, CHARLES JENNENS, GEORGE FRIDERICH HANDEL AND OUR OWN SINGERS & MUSICIANS, DON'T COMBINE TO MAKE YOU BETTER AS YOU DEPART. AMEN.

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