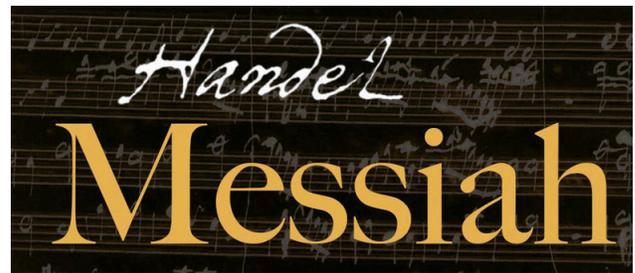


**Let's Go Deeper...**  
**Wednesday, December 7**



My cup runneth over.

That was my response after worship on Sunday as 550 or so of you made your way out of the sanctuary following the McDaniel Memorial Choral Presentation of Handel's *Messiah* presented by Central's choir with professional orchestra under the direction of Director of Music Michael Rintamaa.

My preparation for listening to Sunday's sermon—and that's what we heard, a proclamation of God's Word through voice and instrument—was the previous Sunday's (November 27) presentation by Rev. Jimmy Gawne and Michael Rintamaa. Jimmy and Michael offered a rich hour of theology and musicology, an exploration of the biblical texts woven into Charles Jennens' oratorio as well as some of the myths that have eventuated over time regarding Handel's masterwork.

As I was listening to a recording of Jimmy's exegesis, one of the things that caught my attention was his teaching on the Hebrew words *koh amar* (English: "Thus saith the Lord"). Jimmy noted how this particular phrase pops up throughout *Messiah*. He underscored the significance of the phrase by saying, "When the words *koh amar* were spoken in the temple or the synagogue, it meant, 'Stop everything you're doing. The Lord is speaking. Give your attention to the Lord, for these are the words of Life.'"

Sometimes, I hear in highlight. That is, there are times when I am listening and a particular phrase stands out in my hearing as if highlighted in yellow marker so that I will pay attention. It's as if the Holy Spirit is saying, "Stop everything you're doing. The Lord is speaking. Give your attention to the Lord, for these are the words of Life."

I've learned to pay respectful attention. I write down the words I hear in highlight and return to them that night or during my prayer time next morning to ponder their significance. In the case of Jimmy's teaching on the meaning of *koh amar*, I determined they meant I ought pay close attention to the choir as they sang *Messiah* on Sunday.

So I did. I sat in the front pew, pulpit side, the insert with the lyrics of *Messiah* open on my lap, and with pen in hand, made notes.

When Dr. Randall Black sang the opening passage from Isaiah 40:4 and his voice climbed note after note throughout the word *exalted* ("Ev'ry valley shall be exalted"), I drew an arrow ascending upward from the word *exalted*. And when his voice dipped to hit a low note at the word *low* ("and ev'ry mountain and hill made low"), I drew a thick black line under the word *low*.

When the choir sang, "And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed," I heard the manner in which they sang the word *glory*. I drew lines emanating outward from that (glorious-sounding) word to make it look like a blazing sun. As the basses sang, "for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it," I wrote the word *koh amar*.

Noticing how Michael coaxed a hard “t” sound from the choir at the end of the phrase “the Lord hath spoken **it**,” I underlined the “t” and put an exclamation mark after it. The “t” looked like a cross. At that insight, I saw Michael Rintamaa’s body outlined by the Celtic cross behind the communion table. Squinting my eyes just so, I saw a director’s baton extended from one of the arms of the cross as if the cross of Christ was directing a choir and orchestra’s singing of *Messiah*.

I could go on for pages enumerating all the notes I made on my score on Sunday as the choir sang and the orchestra played.

- How when the choir sang the word *purify* in “He shall purify the sons of Levi” (Malachi 3:3) the dancing notes brought the image of a dancing flame of cleansing fire to my mind.
- How Sherri Phelps’ singing of three words, “Be not afraid,” spoke volumes to me.
- How when the choir’s singing of Isaiah’s majestic prophesy “and his name shall be called...” reached the word *Wonderful*, both the sound as well as the facial expressions of the choir exclaimed *Wonderful!*
- How Kate Covington’s playing of the harpsichord as Katherine Olson sang “There were shepherds abiding in the field” took me back to when I first met Jennie in 1982 and saw one of those exquisite instruments for the first time in her apartment in Nashville.

That memory led me to realize that were it not for my meeting Jennie, my life would be bereft of exposure to the arts. I am not exaggerating when I say I lived the first two decades plus of my life never having seen a play, heard a choral concert, or wandered through an art museum. I know for darn sure I had never heard *Messiah*.

My notes from Sunday end with what I wrote following the last lyric: “His yoke is easy and his burthen is light.” Once again, the choir enunciated a hard “t” on the word **ligh**t****.” As I had done earlier in the score, I underlined the “t” and put an exclamation mark after it along with a cross. Then I wrote in the margin: *Want to follow him? Want to be yoked with him?*

Once more, seeing Michael’s baton appearing as though it was being used by one of the arms of the cross, I added: *Will we let The Messiah conduct our lives?*

In the quiet of the moment that followed that final phrase and preceded our singing of the communion hymn, I answered my own question: *I will, Lord.*

Choir. Orchestra. Michael. G.F. Handel. Dr. McDaniel: You proclaimed the gospel in grace and truth on Sunday. It all came across **in highlight** to me. I give my life again to the Messiah you proclaimed.

See you this Sunday, December 11, for the Third Sunday of Advent.

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

David Shirey