

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30
The Sound of Muzak
5th Sunday after Pentecost
July 4, 5 2020
Prince of Peace Topeka

July 8 and 9, 2017
Overland Park, KS
July 4, 1999
Pentecost 6
Immanuel

A pastor in Duluth, Minn. coined the title of this sermon back in 1974 at a time when shopping malls, doctors, and businesses who put you on hold, were all learning the value of background music, which relaxes, soothes, and reduces customer's buying defenses, without the manipulation being obvious.

This *muzak*, as it is called, is programmed to create a mood, an unhurried mood. It can be jazz, folk, country, or rock – the type of music is unimportant as long as it creates the mood. This means, of course, that *muzak* avoids dramatic music. Stirring, exciting music is too risky. In the second place, you and I are not really supposed to listen to muzak. It must not be distracting. How annoying it would be if suddenly the triumphant strains of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" were to flood the supermarket, and everybody stopped shopping to thrill to the music, or worse yet, were so enthralled by the music that they would just walk on by all the rows of groceries and show up at the checkout counter still transfixed by the melodies. That would not do at all. Or, how would it be if a patient were summoned from the waiting room, only to ask if he could wait awhile until the "1812 Overture" were finished? No, it would not do at all!

We are a society who likes to be soothed and comforted. Watch the evening news and see how easily you can emotionally go from pictures of 150 bodies burned and mutilated in a plane crash to laughing at the pop-and-fresh doughboy being poked in the stomach ten seconds later.

What does muzak have to do with the Gospel? Very simply, we have often taken a message like today's "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest" and made it into a spiritual muzak. We use it to soothe and pacify and paint a picture of life in Christ as a stroll through fields of flowers and blue skies and warm breezes on a summer afternoon. It is sort of like the woman who told her pastor that she loved to come to worship on Sunday because it gave her a chance to get away from the "real world."

Certainly, there are times of great heartache and grief when the Comforter speaks to us in these reassuring words, and it is only the healing balm of the love of Jesus which can give our troubled anxious spirit rest. The Good shepherd needs to call our name in the midst of this pain and lead us by the still water so that we can drink of the living water. I do not mean in any way to take from the healing and peace-giving power of these promises, which Jesus gives us in our Gospel for this morning.

The peace Jesus offers is not, however, the peace of the open meadow where Father knows best and all the neighbors always mow each other's grass. The peace Jesus offers does not promise life to be an "easy street" where nothing ever goes wrong and where we always get our way. The peace Jesus offers is not without pain and loss and distracting joy or sorrow.

The Gospel our Lord speaks is no muzak, but the music of Stricken, Smitten and Afflicted, Go to Dark Gathsemane, and The Old Rugged Cross. The Gospel of our Lord is the music of Jesus Christ is Risen today, Stand Up, Stand Up For Jesus and Lift High the Cross. The Gospel is not relaxing and soothing. The Gospel is dramatic, stirring, exciting and breath taking.

I think sometimes we take the peace of our country and the freedoms we enjoy this Fourth of July for granted in much the same way. The beautiful fireworks and the holiday festivities sometimes cause us to forget the cost of our peace and freedom. We sometimes forget what fireworks symbolize. We see the beautiful colors and forget that the “Rockets red glare and bombs bursting in air” killed soldiers and civilians. It sometimes takes a movie like “Saving Private Ryan” to open people’s eyes to the horrors of war.

In the same way, a Muzak version of the Gospel forgets its true cost. It neglects the horror of Jesus’ betrayal, suffering, brutal crucifixion, death and burial. It lulls us into complacency and inaction.

The stirring symphony of the Gospel on the other hand wakes us from our slumber. It stirs our souls. It reminds us of what Jesus has done for us. It calls us to action.

It even drowns out the sound of pain, sorrow, loss and torment so many people experience in this world – not to soothe in a way that simply allows people to forget their problems for a few moments on Sunday morning – but to heal their pain, ease their sorrow, fill their loss and end their torment.

The music of the Gospel allows us to “Dream the Impossible Dream” and speaks to us when we have “Heartaches by the Number.” It enables us to rejoice and shout halleluiah. There is power in knowing where to go within for peace, power not just to soothe and comfort, but to transform and recreate. There is **STRENGTH** in the music of the Gospel, strength in the life which Jesus lived and now passes on to us.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is not the innocuous sound of Muzak! It is the stirring symphony of the universe. To listen to it, and to live by its melody, is to let the New Life overflow our hearts and lives. Amen.