

## **“Making Music”**

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There is a famous composer, named Benjamin Zander, and he and his wife, Rosamond, wrote a book called “The Art of Possibility.” It’s a beautiful book. In it he tells the story about two salesmen going to Africa in the 1900s.

They were shoe salesmen. So, they get to Africa; they look around; and, the first one runs over to the telegraph and says, “Situation hopeless – stop – they don’t wear any shoes.”

The second salesman runs over to another telegraph office and says, “Glorious opportunity; they are not wearing shoes yet.”

Over and over again, you live in a time where you are thinking that [a situation] is hopeless, and another group of people celebrate the opportunity. Too often we land in the hopeless section without realizing all of the opportunities that are around us. Don’t you just love those people that energize you with their optimism and their hope?

Benjamin Zander is a director – a marvelous one – and his argument is that classical music is not dying. Many people say that the classical music world is almost gone, and he is saying, “no.” He claims, in a TED-Talk, that only three percent of American audiences even want to hear, let alone appreciate classical music. He says too often the classical music community is so busy wishing there was one more percent; four percent. Then they would be able to have enough money to have another [radio] station or sell a few more albums. But, in reality, he said, we should be celebrating the wonderful quality of classical music, and that it isn’t just dying – there is a group of us who believe, “You ain’t seen nothing yet.” We have to get out there and believe that everybody will want to hear it and appreciate it – if they only knew it – and that takes a little education. It takes a little moment to sit people down long enough – away from their cell phones – to listen deeply; but we are all so shallow and running 90 miles an hour we don’t take the time that classical music requires to appreciate it.

It is the same thing with the Christian faith. I believe that “we ain’t seen nothing yet,” with the Church. The sad part is that it feels like sometimes the Christian Church is dying. You see it especially with the mainline [denominations]. Fewer and fewer people are showing up. You see fewer and fewer people passionate [about their faith] and you see a sense of hopelessness rather than a sense of “they don’t have it yet.” We have an incredible audience that is waiting to hear the message of Jesus Christ – the way we would like to share it and believe it to be true.

So, Zander continues, by talking about how you get people to like classical music. He said, the first group of people is a very small group. Those are the people who really love classical music. They have it on their iPods, on their cell phones. They can’t wait to go home and put on an old album. (Let’s be frank here, vinyl is better than CDs) and a world better than streaming that stuff. So you put it on. I have a turn table at home and it is great. I have some classical music, (I also like Led Zeppelin; [laughter] but that is a story for another time – but it is on vinyl.) That is the first group.

The second group is a larger group: That is a group that puts up with classical music. They are the people that, after a long day at work, they pour a glass of Chardonnay and put their feet up, and if there is Vivaldi playing in the background it is alright.

Then the third group: Those are the people who if you polled them, they would say, "I don't like classical music." That is the largest group of people in this country. His comment is that, "they treat classical music like second-hand smoke." You have to put up with it sometimes. It may be in an elevator, or walking through Von Maur with the piano player going. ([To the band,] see what you can do when you retire?) [Laughter.] You put up with it until, thankfully, it is finally over.

He [Zander] said those are the people we have to get along with: the people that just put up with it. Not that it [classical music] is dying. We haven't, as the classical music community, done enough to let them understand the great and glorious music that we have in the classical world.

Zander said the smallest group of all is the saddest group of all: the people who believe they are tone deaf. Is there anyone in here who thinks they are tone deaf? About 10 percent of people think they can't carry a tune in a bucket. You know why they can't carry a tune? It's because someone told them when they were young that they couldn't carry a tune in a bucket.

Tone deaf isn't real because, let's face it, if tone deaf were real, you would not be able to shift the car with a stick shift, because the sound of the clicking is how you often know when you are to shift from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> gear, or 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> gear. You wouldn't be able to know the difference in sound as you are shifting.

You wouldn't be able to tell the difference - if you were tone deaf - between someone with a dialect from Texas, or someone from Boston. Let's face it, we all know the difference between the dialect in Boston and the dialect in Texas. If your mother called you on the phone, not only would you not know who she was - because you couldn't tell the tone - you wouldn't be able to tell her mood. (And we all know when our mothers called us what the mood was!) That is all done by tone. No one is tone deaf.

But classical music, like the Christian church, is facing a challenging time, because we have a whole bunch of people claiming to be tone deaf. They don't want to hear it; and it's because they don't understand it. That is our fault - those of us who like and love classical music - for not sharing it more. It is our fault, especially in the Church, because we have not shared the praise and the joy and the love of who we are. So people have become tone deaf to the faith. I believe the Church needs to act like "we haven't seen nothing yet," and revitalize the true gift, that is the Holy Spirit wanting into the hearts of every man, woman and child in this world.

Now classical music - like the Church - needs people who believe fully in the process. Dr. Zander said, "Imagine, Martin Luther King, Jr. saying, 'I have a dream; but, of course, I'm not sure we are up to it.'" That wouldn't have worked. Dr. King led a revival in the hearts and minds of people to transform the world in which we live - and one of the most difficult points in human history - because nothing would let it get him down, or get in the way of

that mission and vision. That is how we need to act. It is an issue of perspective, and nothing was going to get in the way of Dr. King's perspective.

Now, in a classic 1953 experiment, researchers were stunned to find that frogs' eyes - are you with me? We are talking about frogs' eyes and away from classical music. Frogs' eyes were capable of perceiving only four types of phenomena. All frogs can only recognize contrast, sudden changes in illumination, outlines in motion, and the curves of outlines of small dark objects. That's it. That is all a frog sees. You grab a frog and that is what it sees when you put it right [up] to your face. A frog cannot see a mother's face, a frog cannot see a sunset, or nuances in color; just those four things, mainly shades and outlines. Its perspective is set based on two things: One, so it can find food to eat; and two, its perspective is based on not being eaten. So when you have contrast and change in illumination and motion, curves and outlines, it's to find insects so it can eat, and spot a stork so it doesn't get eaten. That is its whole reason for seeing; its perspective is small because that is all it needs for its existence.

Now, Dr. Zander said the problem we have is people's perspective keeps getting smaller in the world in which we live. He is arguing that classical music's perspective is being pushed out. I believe the same thing is true with the Church. Our perspectives are getting smaller and smaller and it's pushing out the faith. We need to help people to see and broaden their perspective, if they are to retain or recommit to a faith.

At Westminster, we need people to see and perceive the changes. Our perceptions can change, and you change by changing your mental map, and the categories of the world in which you live and perceive the world. For example, if in your life you have experienced nothing but hardships and pain your entire life, that pain and suffering will create a built-in precept for who you are; and [you will be] waiting for the next person to hurt you, because the last persons always did. That is your built-in precept. But it can change! For example, you find one teacher when you go to school who cares about you, who celebrates you as a person, listens to you, a teacher who believes in you; and, all of a sudden grades go up, hope starts to develop and you are able to change your precept. You believe you have value and worth. It can change the world, just one person changing that mental map - that category within your heart.

We need to change the mental map of the Christian faith. Change those categories, so that we have an opportunity to share and make better music in the faith. Westminster is not dying. We have stabilized and we need to look at extending our ministry in a more influential way. The way we do that is to say, "What makes us unique and why is it important that we exist?" When we can answer those questions, then we can begin to share the ministry.

Yesterday, the Presbytery sold Cottage Grove Presbyterian Church. They sold it for \$240,000. Frankly, I'm shocked and amazed that they could get that much. The good aspect of that is the money is now available, if the Presbytery uses it wisely, to do wonderful ministry with that money. But there was a part of me that was cringing while I heard this, because they sold it [the church] to an ultra-conservative congregation from Ames. Let me tell you, if you go to Iowa State you know Cornerstone Church. That church brings in kids from all over that university campus. They do an amazing, dynamic job of ministry.

The reason that I cringe is because I wish our Presbytery could have come up with a way for us to do that ministry. They [Cornerstone Church] want to go to Drake - that doesn't have that kind of ministry - and they believe that within the next few weeks they will have 500 students worshipping, at [that] Cottage Grove [building] every week. From nothing to 500 and I don't doubt them.

The thing that I struggle with is that their brand of Christianity is something that we preach in opposition to regularly. You go on the Cornerstone Church website and it talks about the theology of the separation between men and women; about how men and women are different; celebration of the women staying in the home. You won't see a woman up preaching the word to men in that church. I won't even begin to talk about what they think about the LGBT community and what they believe about gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. It needs to be more open and affirming. Often the more liberal, mainline churches keep their mouths shut when they should be proclaiming a message that is glorious and inclusive - a message that people need to hear, because too often the LGBT community has been shut out, has been condemned, has been hurt. It is so sad that the church - our church - all churches have either been condemning or, in our case, not [talking] loud enough.

We need to make music. We need to make our music loud and we need to make it vibrant so that [when] they hear it; because when 500 kids from Drake go there, they will hear that women need to know their place; and the gay community is not invited to make music in that place, unless they change who they are and how God made them.

What are we doing to not stand up and say, "We have a place for you, Drake students, as you are in your 18-22 years of age, when you are at the most transformative moments in your life?" The only Christian message that is happening is to tell women to shut up and gay people to go away.

What are we doing that we are not saying and doing everything we can to say women are equal, are affirmed and are blessed in the eyes of God with the same credentials of faith, hope and life that any man is: and that gay, lesbian and transgender and bisexual people are every bit as loved, cared for and equal as anyone else? We are not singing that message loudly enough, and they will get their 500 people. I hope we figure out how to not be quite so silent.

Benjamin Zander said, "I started directing when I was 25 years old - directing orchestras, choirs and it wasn't until I was 45 years old that I had a revelation. It took 20 years of directing to figure this out." He said, "I have been conducting for 20 years and I realized that the conductor doesn't make a sound." (I should have had John Cook here. I gave him the day off, because he wasn't conducting. If anyone should have been here to hear that, it is John.) "The director doesn't make a sound," he said. "It is funny who appears on the cover of the CD - the director - [who] is gesticulating, but not making a sound.

"I realized that my power as a director, or any director's power, only occurs by making other people powerful. Your director is celebrated because of how he brings out the power in you; if he cannot motivate and instill a oneness in you. Jazz is so amazing, isn't it? Because it is so individual and it brings out this feeling and this emotion that is so

individual to each person. You can stand up individually and play, but you have to do it in an organized fashion that you all come back in together on?

We rely on each other. That is why God brought us together as a Church, because we cannot live out our faith alone, and make a difference. But together we can do great things - transforming life, changing things. But what it requires of every Church is how we empower each other, strengthen each other, find each other's voice, to sing and play music together in a way that changes minds and transforms hearts.

We can sing as a congregation. We have a unique voice and it is still part of the voice of God in Jesus Christ. [We can] Share that reality with Cornerstone, Plymouth, and Holy Trinity; we share it with our Muslim brothers and sisters, with our Buddhist brothers and sisters. We share a commitment to community and a faith in God. But we do it in unique ways. We have to stand up for what we believe; and, for Westminster, it is standing up for an inclusive, loving, and equal respectful way of sharing the faith.

It is easy to be a fundamentalist. You quote a few passages of Scripture, you memorize them, you regurgitate them, and you say them whether they are in context or not. It is hard to be a liberal mainline member, because everything has to be interpretive. You have to put it within a context - a historical context and a literary context. You have to put it within all sorts of higher critical methods of interpretation. By the time you explain that to someone, they have rolled their eyes and walked away. You have to know it yourself - not just well enough to believe it but to teach it. It is hard work, and that is why it is easier to be a fundamentalist than a mainline liberal Protestant or Roman Catholic - but, by golly, that is our job.

So we need to get to work, we have to explain why the LGB community is not a sinful group, but a whole loved and blessed group by God. We have to explain when in Scripture it says women need to know their place, why that is not true and why it was stated in Scripture to begin with, and what it actually meant. If you can't answer that for yourself we have more work to do. If you can't explain it to your children, or your neighbor, we have more work to do. That is what making music is all about in the life of the Church: singing together the truth of the Gospel - and it shouldn't be easy. If it is too easy it needs to question.

Westminster's ministry is worth giving our lives for - it is ministry. Westminster's theology is worth saving and Westminster's vision is a dream worth having. I just pray that we will continue to work diligently, singing the glorious gift of inclusivity so that we will continue to open our doors and arms to all people.

So let's start selling - like the old shoe salesman - the real ministry of Jesus Christ, with our whole heart and mind. Zander made one other comment. He said, "If you are a parent, or a teacher, or preacher, or whoever you are; if you are in front of a group of people and you want to know whether you are being heard or not, look into their eyes. If you look into their eyes - and if their eyes are shining - you've got them. If they are glazed over, you lost them." We need to share our ministry of inclusivity and joy in such a way that we practice it over and over again, until those eyes are shining.

You talk to these kids [the band]. They didn't just start by picking up that instrument and playing it. They had to practice it, and practice and drive their parents absolutely bonkers, because it didn't start out great, I bet. You and I have to practice sharing our faith over and over, practicing it until it goes from being squawking to shining. We need to get started now because there are people every day who hear that women should shut up and stay in their place, and the gay people have no right to be here. That is not a message I want to share, or hear, and it is not the message of Jesus Christ - but I'm worried it will be the only message heard.

We have to get started and we have to sing loud. Let's start today.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen