

New Organ Dedication

St. Paul's United Methodist Church of Elizabethtown
October 31, 2021

Pastor David Woolverton

Would you join with me in prayer?

Open us up to your word, O Lord, and open your word up to us. Teach us what you would have us learn as you can form our hearts into the disciples that you have called us to be. All of this Lord, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

I wonder if you remember. It was the 200th episode of All in the Family. It was also the U.S. Voyager #1 when it got closest to Jupiter to take actual photographs. The U.S. House of Representatives started broadcasting on C-SPAN for the very first time, and a lot of us watched right? It was also the year that Israel had their parliament accept the peace treaty with Egypt. Do you know what year that was? Well, maybe this will help you. I know it will help at least several of you in this room. It was the year where we had a partial meltdown at Three Mile Island. Ah, see, I thought it was the 200th episode of All in the Family that would get that reaction. Do you remember when that was? Yeah, 1979. 1979 in specific, it was March of 1979. Do you know what else happened in March of 1979? Well, 1979 and specific in March of 1979, St. Paul's Church installed a brand-new organ in this sanctuary. 42 years, 42 years of incredible music that in its day was a major instrument of technology. 1979. And over the course of those 42 years since then, many a note was struck, many a stop was pulled, many a marriage ceremony took place and many a saint was ushered by music into the wonderful embrace of grace of their awaiting Heavenly Father. Many a baptism. Many a tear. Many a hurt was soothed. Many a culture was somehow questioned by music that was played on that instrument. And many, many a soldier was celebrated.

It's amazing what one instrument can see. And what one congregation could experience through the gift of music. Today, with joy, we have the opportunity to celebrate a new day, a new instrument. The generosity of primarily to families within this congregation have made it possible for us to replace that incredible organ with even newer technology. Technology that takes the best of the old and marries it with the new. Technology that enables us for the next 40, 50 or even 60 years from now to touch the hearts and lives of people within this community of faith and beyond that community of faith. For music, music is a language of love that far surpasses any of our differences and draws us into the presence of our Heavenly Father. That's what music can do.

And so today we gather, we gather to celebrate. And to sing songs and to lift up our voices and to praise the God who is constantly inviting us into a wonderful song. Scripture is filled with words of invitation and music invitation and specific.

Clap your hands, all you people shout on to God with a voice of triumph. It's an invitation to come and celebrate being in the presence of God, the God who is already purchased victory for us. Strike up the instruments. Clash the symbols. Beat the drums. Ring out the sounds. That's what our psalms say. And as we the people of faith who are on this side of the Cross of Christ and know the end of the story that is yet to come, it should engage us into the full range of praise as we lift up our voices as we dare to lift up the sounds of multiple instruments and be the body of believers that cannot help but sing and praise and make music to the Lord.

1979. I was a junior in high school when that first organ went in. But already, music was shaping itself in my life. When I arrived here just a little over five years ago, I gathered the congregation as many as who were available into small groups. Yep Meetings is what I called them. Your Evening with the Pastor or Yap Meetings, Your Afternoon with the Pastor and whether we were yepping or yapping, I asked a very specific question to each of those groups, 'what's one thing that really excites you about this congregation?' Close to the top of the list was the music. The music that was especially important to us. And then I asked another question, 'as you look forward to the next one to three years, what's one thing that really excites you?' At the top of the list was what was becoming an exciting new music ministry. Music is at the heartbeat of this congregation. Music is a heritage that is meant to continue on. Music is a liturgy that tells the story of who Jesus is. And music is an invitation. It's an invitation for us to trust in the God who holds all of life in the palm of his hands.

As we gather every Sunday and we listen to the organ, to the piano, to the choir, to the bells, to ourselves as a congregation singing, we are reminded that no matter what it is that we face, no matter what challenges are going on in our world, no matter what excitement or what depth of pain, when we sing, when we make music, we remember that God has already written the end of the story and we reside in his grace.

A lot can happen in 42 years. Sometimes our bodies fall apart. Sometimes our instruments do. Our organ was rapidly falling apart. It was falling apart for several years. Two families in this congregation. Heard a vision, taking shape within their hearts. Yes, I said heard a vision. Because the vision was musical. Now, those families have asked me not to reveal their names publicly. They did not want to draw attention to themselves, and so I'm honoring that request, but on behalf of this congregation, we thank you for your generosity for you have empowered the music of this congregation and you have empowered the music of the spirit of God to ring out from this place, to touch the hearts and lives and minds and souls of not only this generation, but the generations to come. This instrument crosses the line of generations and empowers that voice.

Just for kicks and giggles, this old organ that we have replaced was installed officially on March 19th, 1979, at a price tag of \$28,000.00. That was a lot of money back in 1979. I think it's still a lot of money. Eh? Today we install a new organ. A Rodgers Imagined Series 351 D. It's got a lot of power. For example, Caleb (Sisak), can you just play one note? You can pick whatever note and use, I'm going to use some organ language here, use an eight-footer and just let us hear what that sounds like [note plays]. Same note using a 16-footer [note plays]. Same note using a 32-footer [note plays].



So, there's a high note, what's the highest note that you can play on there? [note plays] That's all right. Just pick one, I'm throwing stuff at him that we didn't rehearse. Although I'm going to ask you the lowest, [note plays] that's the lowest? You all hear that. I would be way too cute to say, which ear do you hear that in? How a high note? You have a flute or a piccolo [note plays]? Are you playing something [note plays]? Oh my gosh. Did anybody hear that? I didn't hear it. That worries me. That's great. And just one more for us. There is the capacity in this organ to even, not that we're going to do this, to even play without an organist. Can you demonstrate that, Caleb? [music plays] All right. It's truly amazing what this instrument can do. And we invite you at any time over

the next weeks or months at your leisure after worship, certainly to approach Caleb ask for demonstrations, but definitely for worship. We invite you to be the worshiping group of individuals that hold music at your heart. It's an invitation not only to sing, but to listen and to worship within music.

Truly, I joked just a moment ago that we have an organ that does not even need an organist. But we cannot truly be a worshiping community without sharing our giftedness. And so, Caleb, if you wouldn't mind standing as you are able. And John (Messick), if you would stand, these two individuals helped to choose this organ and they are the musicians that help make this organ run smoothly week to week. We have additional individuals within our congregation like Etta (Buchwald), who have played this organ and who have played the previous organ. We are indebted to these musicians. But I think you have borne testimony to the giftedness of individuals of great skill, and I just wanted to have this opportunity to say publicly, thank you. Thank you for all of what you give.

And to the bell choirs and the sanctuary choirs and to all of the musicians who helped shape the music of this church, thank you. Together we are a singing body. Together we are a worshiping body. Together we allow music to shape us as the liturgy of the people. There is an important phrase that was in the scripture that Jen (Lerch) read to us today. It was from I Corinthians 14. Paul writes,

"What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up."



Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. So, our worship, our singing, our words of encouragement, our words of inspiration, our fellowship with one another; everything is about building up the body of believers that we call the church. And so, to that end, we would like to dedicate to this organ to the glory of God, to the praise of his people and to the invitation always to be a worshiping congregation, always to be a singing congregation, always to be an instrument based congregation, regardless of the style of worship or the style of music that you prefer. Let us take out our instruments and lift them up to the praise of our God. Whatever we play, whatever we sing, whatever we do. Let it be to the praise of Jesus Christ.

Would you join with me in prayer?

Holy God, we dedicate this organ not as an idol that we worship, but a tool that we use to worship you. We pray, Father, that every note that is played, every song that is lifted up, will allow our voices to join the ongoing chorus of praise that's going on in heaven. That you would use this instrument to help embody the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Whether the song has lyrics, or the notes are the lyrics, sing through us, Lord. All to your glory and praise. As we pray this in Jesus' name. And all God's people said, Amen. Thank you. Thank you for being with us. Thank you for joining with us on this journey of worship. And we also from the bottom of our hearts, share our appreciation to the families who made this possible.

Will you pray with me?

Gracious, Father, we give you thanks for your word and for the gift of that word to remind us who we are and whose we are. We give it all to you, Lord, as we pray this in the powerful name of Jesus Christ, our savior. Amen.