



Beverly Heights
Presbyterian
Church

scattered seeds.

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A BEAUTIFUL BRIDE



*Finding beauty in
the Church*

GETTING RITES RIGHT

By Kyle Bennett

My sons, Calvin and Miles, have been playing baseball. It's Miles' second year and Calvin's first. Without fail, I find them in the backyard playing catch, running the bases, pitching to each other, and consummately antagonizing each other. They've gotten really good at all of these activities, especially antagonizing.

Watching them reminds me of the old adage, "Practice makes perfect." It's true. Those who practice a profession get proficient at it.

If you want to field grounders well, you have to spend your days scooping them up. If you want to knit scarves, you have to crochet regularly. If you want your kids to obey you, you have to correct them daily.

The logic of practice also applies to religious rites like confessing our sins, hearing the Word of God and partaking of the Lord's Supper. If you want to get comfortable confessing your sins, or attentive

to God's word, or being nourished by His body and blood, you have to practice it.

Some in the Church find this line of thinking dubious. *Practice?! What are you talking about? Won't partaking of the Lord's Supper on a regular basis render it meaningless? Won't frequency of confession lead to insincerity? Won't hearing a sermon multiple times desensitize us to its message?*

Yet we don't refrain from saying "I'm sorry" to our spouses out of fear of it becoming disingenuous. We don't kiss our kids infrequently out of concern for it becoming rote routine. We don't object to having close

friends over for dinner parties because we're worried our friendship will be taken for granted.

The same road cannot lead to both perfection and perdition. Whether plain practices or religious rites, the logic stands: practice makes perfect.



Some in the Church have an "absence-makes-the-heart-grow-fonder" view of our Savior's sacraments. This view assumes that novelty and spontaneity are what make things meaningful. And that infrequency breeds sincerity. It believes that God-given gifts like the Lord's Supper are too holy to touch on a regular basis.

But our Lord doesn't share this view. He isn't absent, nor does He want to be. In fact, He wants to be *more* present to us. Which is why He sent the Holy Spirit and gave us the Church and why He instituted His sacraments. He wants to be more present to us through these gifts!

As a sacrament, the Lord's Supper is a means by which Christ is mediated to us. It "holds forth" Christ and His salvation and grace to us, as the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it. It – along with confession, preaching of the Word, and prayer – is necessary for the Church. We need them to know Christ and live in Him.

The more we confess our guilt and sins, the quicker we will recognize His grace and express gratitude. The more often we listen to His words and meditate

on them, the more He will inhabit our thoughts and dreams. The more we partake of His body and blood, the more we will remember, profess and long for Him.

There is a beauty captured in the contours of practice. There is an attraction to things done well. There is a fullness found in purpose. We were designed to be full of our Creator.

We were meant to eat and drink our Savior. We were made to feast for eternity.

"Practice makes perfect."

The next few months here at Beverly Heights will be a "Summer of Psalms and Sacraments," during which we will engage more deeply in the practice of what distinguishes us as Christians. Eat His body with regularity, drink His blood routinely, and hear His Word with repetition.

Sing His praises with resound. And watch your life overflow with His presence and grace!

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Kyle Bennett, Ph.D., is husband to Andrea and father to Elliott, Miles and Calvin. He also serves as director of our preschool and principal of our Academy.

THE CHURCH CENTERED MISSION

By Peter Chace

When I met Wesley Seo, he looked like a displaced California surfer who accidentally landed in Pittsburgh. This is probably because Wes *is* a California surfer. But I soon found out that he was not out of place. He was exactly where the Lord wanted Him to be.

Wes walked through the doors of Crossroads, the Wednesday night fellowship group that Beverly Heights sponsors at Duquesne University, and shook my hand. After speaking that evening, we decided to meet up a few days later to continue the conversation.

Wes got straight to the point.

“There’s this girl. She’s pretty special. What do you think I should do?”

I replied, “Well, let’s start at the beginning. Where are you going to church?”

He said, “I’m not really sure yet. I’ve tried a few different places.”

I said, “Start coming to Beverly Heights. You need a good church!”

Over the following weeks we discussed church and

marriage. Wes was a sponge. He started coming to Beverly Heights and got married to Hannah last summer. They moved across the country from southern California and started a life here in Pittsburgh, as Wes finishes his graduate degree.

Now Wes and Hannah lead Crossroads on Wednesday nights.

This is the mission of God. It begins in the Church, flows into the world and brings the world back into the Church. *The Church is the center of missions, and it is beautiful.*

Sometimes we make the mistake of thinking that missions can only happen “out there” by crossing an ocean. The truth is that missions begins – and ends – *right here.*

When I step onto campus, I first step out of the doors of our church.

When I meet and pray with students, I do so as a member of Beverly Heights, bringing a taste of our church with me. When I offer the Good News of Jesus, I do so on behalf of this congregation.

This is how missions works. I step out of the church onto the campus and invite Wes to step off the campus and into the church with me. *Wes then goes and does the same thing.*



Wesley and Hannah Seo on their wedding day, July 23, 2022.

Here’s another example.

When I first met Hanna Everhart, she looked like a displaced explorer in her giant parka. This is because she is a student athlete who’d just finished evening swim practice. And like Wes, I learned that Hanna was not out of place. She was right where the Lord wanted her to be.

Wes and Hannah Seo invited her to the Ash Wednesday service. Hanna stepped off campus with them and stepped into the church.

Hanna asked if we could meet soon after. She had a lot of good questions and a heart that was hungry for Jesus.

“How do I know if I believe?” she asked. “I think I want to be a Christian.”

So, I invited her off of campus and into the Church. I shared the gospel with her.

I told her about the God who made her, the Father who loves her, the Christ who died for her and the Spirit who breathes life into her. We prayed for the forgiveness of sins and for the faith to trust in Him. *It was beautiful, the Gospel always is.*

Hanna said, “Pete, if it’s not too much, can we meet regularly? I think I need a mentor in my life for my faith because I’m afraid I’ll waiver by myself.”

I replied with a familiar phrase: “Start coming to Beverly Heights. You need a good church!”

Hanna began coming to Beverly Heights regularly a few weeks ago. She is hungry to grow. I agreed to meet regularly if she invited a few other students to join.

By the end of the next Crossroads meeting, she had 10 students lined up. We meet in the A-Level meeting room on Wednesday nights during the summer.

I have spent the entire past year reading, writing and thinking about missions as part of the church task force I head. And in the end, all my inquiry led me to discover what missions really is: I invited Wes, Wes invited Hanna, Hanna invited nine more.

They stepped out of the world and into the Church. This is missions. It starts in the Church, flows into the world and brings the world back into the Church. *The Church is the center of missions, and it is beautiful.*

Peter Chace is husband to Sarah and father to Noah, Liam, Eli, Eva and Lily. He leads our ministry to youth and college students. Peter is also working toward his Master of Divinity degree, which he expects to complete in 2024.

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SWEET SOUNDS OF WORSHIP

By Elissa Winkler

For almost a decade, as part my children's bedtime routine, I would sing to them before I kissed them goodnight. Though my repertoire ranged from *Amazing Grace* to *The Wheels on the Bus*, I always ended with this song:

*I love you, Lord and I lift my voice
To worship you, oh my soul,
rejoice
Take joy, my King in what
you hear
Let it be a **sweet, sweet**
sound in your ear*

This simple chorus has been my theme song since I learned it as a young girl and a prayer that has shaped my calling as director of music in worship here. When I sat down to write about beauty and singing in worship, my mind went back to the final phrase of this song.

I considered the way the author described sound as sweet, a term most often associated with taste and smell. In classical music, too, a composer will indicate a musical phrase to be played or sung sweetly (*dolce*), which often begs the question: what does that mean? A good substitute for *sweet is beautiful*. I believe that the link between those two words is profoundly biblical and holds the key to understanding the beauty of song.

The aroma of worship

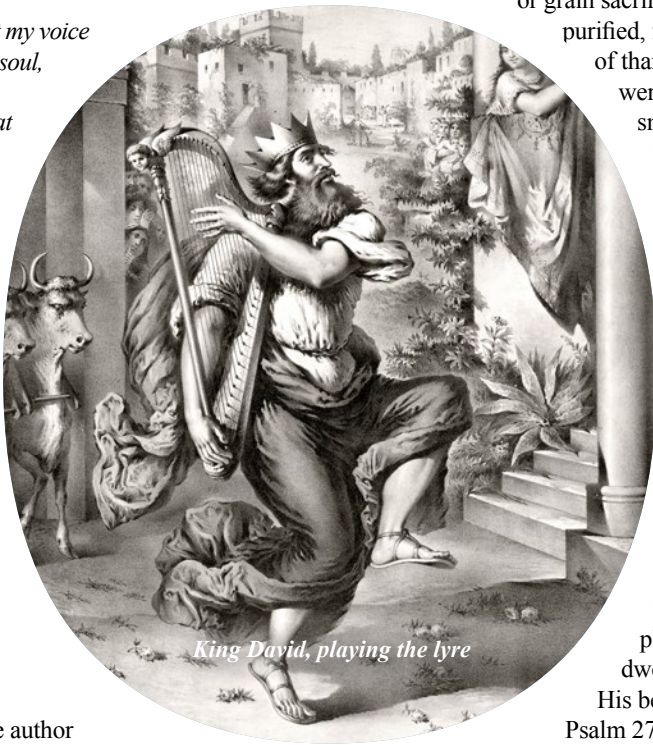
Following the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, God gives His covenant people instructions in order that He might dwell with them. By offering animal or grain sacrifices, the Israelites were purified, forgiven and offered tithes of thanksgiving. These offerings were burned in fire. As the smoke from the offering would ascend, we read in Leviticus that it was "a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the Lord."

Their worship was something they and the Lord could *smell*, and when offerings culminated in feasting, *taste*. Yet altar sacrifice alone wasn't enough. It had to be accompanied by a contrite spirit. It was their *obedience* which pleased the Lord. Then God dwelled with His people, and His beauty surrounded them.

Psalm 27:4 tells us: “One thing I ask of the Lord, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord and gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek Him in His temple.”

Sacrificial song

Before the Temple was built, God directed David to restructure worship by adding music to the sacrificial



King David, playing the lyre

animal and grain offerings. In addition to composing music and inventing instruments, David designated skilled musicians to assist the Israelites in offering song. Music was intricately woven into their sacrificial liturgy.

Songs of contrition, praise, adoration and thanks mingled together, in concert with the aroma rising from the altar on which their burnt offerings lay, and ascended to heaven. A *sweet sound*, you might say.

In the new covenant which Jesus accomplished on the cross, we no longer use animal or grain sacrifices because our worship is *embodied* sacrifice.

In his book *Theopolitical Liturgy*, Rev. Peter Leithart explains: “After Jesus, *because of Jesus*, sacrifice is humanized in the church . . . into **sacrifice of praise**.” As we offer ourselves as living sacrifices, using *song* is a primary way to do so. Rev. Leithart continues: “Perhaps *music* should be as central to Christian worship as sacrifice was to Israel’s worship.”

Augustine: “Singing belongs to one who loves.”

Why wouldn't we sing with all our hearts to the King? Singing is glorified speech; it beautifies text. The saying, "*when words fail, music speaks*," is cliché, but true. We could recite the Doxology each Sunday, but far more beautiful is the sound of 200 voices joining in harmony, filling our sanctuary: "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow."

In the Israelites' worship, song was used as the dialogue between God and His people. In the new covenant, the sweet song continues as the conversation between Jesus and His Bride, the Church. Augustine said, "*only the lover sings.*" When God calls His people to Himself on the Lord's Day, will we respond with a lover's song?

Our Songbook

The Church has been given an inspired sourcebook for beautiful worship: the Psalms. This book contains offerings of praise, thanksgiving, repentance and cries for redemption. We are instructed to sing for joy, use instruments, to sing and play skillfully; to sing a new song.

Throughout this “Summer of Psalms,” as we sing from God’s songbook, I encourage you to jump in with enthusiasm.

Learning a harmony line or new melody may take practice. But think of it as rehearsing what we will do for eternity, which is worshipping our Creator and Redeemer.

Let us follow Christ's example by offering ourselves as living sacrifices before the altar of God. This is our obedient, beautiful sacrifice of praise. May it be a sweet, sweet sound in His ear.

Among her many duties, Elissa Winkler is wife to Chad and mom to Hudson and Selah. She also directs the adult and children's choirs, the music program in our Academy and serves as director of music in worship.

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ON BEARDS, BEAUTY AND BREAD

By Senior Pastor Nate Devlin

I recently participated in a seminar at the Theopolis Institute in Birmingham, Alabama.

Theopolis is led by Rev. Peter Leithart, a theologian, scholar and the keynote speaker at our Scattered Seeds Symposium this October. The seminar included participation in three worship services at set hours each day: *Matins* in the morning, *Sext* at noontime and *Vespers* in the evening.

One of the liturgical practices within the services I was not prepared for was the “holy kiss.” On the first day, we were instructed that at the end of the *Matins* service we would pass the peace with a holy kiss. We were told to announce “peace be with you” and then extend a kiss on the cheek or neck of our fellow brother. Men and women were told to only shake hands.

When the service ended, I bravely made my way to my nearest brother and launched into a kiss. It felt a little like my first-time cliff diving in college when I took the plunge 40 feet into the water.

In that moment I also realized I was only one of three men at the seminar who did not have a beard, and so most of my holy kisses were met by prickly faces full of hair.

Though a completely new and at first awkward experience, the moment, overall, truly felt holy. By the end of the seminar, I could honestly say that my engagement in worship there was a formative, enriching and unifying experience.

Rev. Leithart (himself bearded) stressed

that we kiss because the Bible commands us to greet one another in such a way. It is a clear sign of the peace and unity within the body of Christ. In other words, the holy kiss is a beautiful Christian practice, beard and all.

As I was thinking about beards this morning, I received an email that my



The hands of Rev. Rod Whitacre and Margaret, his wife of 50 years. The former New Testament professor at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Rev. Whitacre, 73, of Sewickley, went to be with the Lord on May 22, 2023.

New Testament professor, Rev. Rod Whitacre, passed away from his battle with lymphoma. I was reminded of some comments he once made on Psalm 133. In addition to being a bearded professor, he was an Anglican priest. He believed that every ordinand should have Psalm 133 read at his ordination service:

“Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!

It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.”

Unity is indeed “good and pleasant.” It is a sign of health and beauty. It is like oil on Aaron’s beard, poured out on him at his ordination, running down onto the collar of his priestly robes. Rev. Whitacre strove to model this kind of beauty throughout his ministry (beard and all!), and I will always be grateful for his teaching.

Not all of us will grow beards, and many of us might be hesitant to offer a holy kiss, but that does not keep us from receiving and participating in a beautiful sign of our Christian unity.

Communion is the practice given to all the church as a sign of our unity.

In unity we all partake of one loaf; we all drink of one cup. When we eat, our communion is with the Lord Jesus Christ and with one another as His body, the church.

When we eat together in worship, it is beautiful, like a kiss that is shared, like oil on Aaron’s beard. This summer we will celebrate the Lord’s Supper every Sunday. It might be a new experience for some, but I believe it will be beautiful.