

Mission Moments – May 18, 2007
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From the Center for U.S. Missions
Following Jesus into the U.S. Mission Field
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"Where's the Beef?"
by Rev. Mike Zehnder
National Missional Worship Consultant

Remember the humorous "Where's the beef?" advertising campaign of the 1980s from Wendy's hamburger chain? A short, cute little old lady, played by 81-year-old Clara Peller, ordered a hamburger at various fast food restaurants. When it was served, she'd lift the bun, wrinkle her nose, and quizzically demand: "Where's the beef?"

Making the rounds to various spiritual food establishments (churches) in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, I've been tempted to utter that same line. I recently reported to the Commission on Worship what I've noticed as I consult and help our churches in the area of worship. Although there are wonderful exceptions, many worship leaders do not use discernment when they borrow songs from contemporary Christian music radio. It causes me to wonder: "Where's the beef?"

For instance, "Word of God Speak" is a beautiful song on Christian radio. It starts slow; then it soars; it's full of passion and life. I like to hear it and sing it. But should it be sung by a congregation? Consider the first lines:

*I'm finding myself at a loss for words/And the funny thing is it's okay
The last thing I need is to be heard/But to hear what You would say.*

*Word of God speak/Would You pour down like rain
Washing my eyes to see Your majesty
To be still and know/That You're in this place...?¹*

The theology is biblically respectable when the text expresses that worship is first of all an opportunity to hear God speak through Word and Sacrament. The song is a request to have our eyes and ears opened to clearly hear what God, not man, has to say. When we do speak, it's in response to what He first said. ("The last thing I need is to be heard.") We simply say back to God what He has already said to us in His Word. We respond to His love because He first loved us.

But imagine singing the first paragraph of that song in church. Is this really a text for group song? It might be appropriate for a soloist, but not a congregation.

¹ CCLI Song No. 3912788 Bart Millard / Pete Kipley © 2002 Simpleville Music\Songs From The Indigo Room\Wordspring Music, LLC (Admin. by Fun Attic Music)\(Admin. by Word Music Group, Inc.) All rights Reserved.

When we hear a song and think about using it in worship, we need to ask a number of questions: "Is this true and biblically faithful? Is the text appropriate for a congregation, or for a choir/soloist? Is the tempo and is the key appropriate for a congregation, or for a Christian band?" If I'm asked one more time to sing the first tenor high notes of Chris Tomlin's songs as performed on CD, my throat is going to need more than a few lozenges.

But the songs that really make me want to shout "Where's the beef?" are ones like this:

Chorus

*Lord I'm amazed by You/Lord I'm amazed by You
Lord I'm amazed by You/How You love me
Lord I'm amazed by You/O, Lord I'm amazed by You
Lord I'm amazed by You/How You love me*

Verse 1

*You dance over me/While I am unaware
(And) You sing all around/But I never hear the sound*

Chorus

Lord I'm amazed by You..., etc.²

I whole-heartedly agree that God's love is amazing. Paul prays that we would know just how high and wide, etc. it really is. The problem with the above song isn't in what it says, but in what it **doesn't** say. It doesn't say **why** his love is amazing so that we can praise Him for His mighty acts. In contrast, consider another song of amazement that does state the reasons:

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound/That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now am found/Was blind, but now I see.³*

Here's another good example, a "beefy" contemporary Praise and Worship text:

*In Christ alone my hope is found/He is my light, my strength, my song
This cornerstone, this solid ground/Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace/When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My comforter, my all in all/Here in the love of Christ I stand.*

*In Christ alone who took on flesh/Fullness of God in helpless Babe
This gift of love and righteousness/Scorned by the ones He came to save
'Til on that cross as Jesus died/The wrath of God was satisfied
For ev'ry sin on Him was laid/Here in the death of Christ I live...⁴*

² CCLI Song No. 4221021 Jared Anderson © 2004 Vertical Worship Songs All rights Reserved.

³ Public Domain.

⁴ CCLI Song No. 3350395 Keith Getty / Stuart Townend © 2001 Thankyou Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing) All rights Reserved

Why sing about being “at a loss for words,” when such powerful words of truth can be sung? Why sing amazement that God “dances over them with love” when they can sing about the lengths to which his amazing love would go: “The wrath of God was satisfied when all our sins were laid on Him”? Now that’s beef! Luther said, “The Gospel should be proclaimed as clearly from the loft as from the pulpit.” Indeed! Why do anything less than that when our people are daily bombarded by the lies of a pagan culture? People need meat, not just ketchup and pickle on a bun. This can only happen if we ask of our worship songs, “Where’s the beef?”

This fall I plan to create a topical list of contemporary songs of substance, to help you locate the best of the best, on the website of the Center for U.S. Missions. I also plan to suggest contemporary songs that fit the themes of the three year lectionary, to make your worship planning easier. But on your own and until those tools arrive, keep asking Clara’s question of your contemporary worship songs. Don’t settle for anything less than the finest beef of Law and Gospel!

Moment Extras

Questions for Reflection

1. When is the last time you reflected on the content of a song sung in your church?
2. How many “I” and “me” songs does your congregation sing on any given Sunday?
3. How often does your church sing songs that fail to tell the story of God’s grace?
4. How are songs selected in your congregation? Is there a theme? Do they relate to the focus of the message or scripture readings for the day?
5. What is your favorite hymn or song? Why?

Links

Developing Criteria for Choosing Music in Worship: A Consideration of Theology and Music
By Kevin L Keele, http://www.eskimo.com/~keele/developing_criteria.html

A long but well thought out article on selecting songs for worship.

Lyrics: Here’s a list of sites that offer Christian lyrics online. One of these sites would be a good stop when considering songs for worship with which you may not be familiar.

- Christian Lyrics Online <http://www.christianlyricsonline.com/>
- Christian Song Lyrics – Includes the Top 20 Christian Billboard Song Lyrics
<http://www.songlyrics.com/christiansonglyrics.php>
- Today’s Christian Music <http://www.todaychristianmusic.com/music.aspx>

CCLI <http://www.ccli.com/>

Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) provides churches with simple, affordable solutions to complex copyright issues surrounding congregational worship

services. CCLI helps churches maintain their integrity and avoid costly lawsuits, while also giving churches the freedom to worship expressively and spontaneously.

Video: Where's The Beef?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aazcUsxTDhM>

View the 1984 commercial to which the article refers.

News from the Center

1. National Worship Consultant Mike Zehnder will be speaking at the June 4-6 Hearts 4 the Harvest Missionary Conference in the Pacific Southwest District. If you'll be there, say hi to Mike and stop by the Center's display.
2. Early bird registration ends in two weeks, on June 2nd, for all the trainings in our On the Edge: Training for Missional Leaders week, July 23-27. Five trainings are offered on the campus of Concordia University, Irvine, California. Some are new; some are long-time favorites of those we serve. Some last the full week; others are just two days. See <http://www.centerforusmissions.org/ontheedge/index.html> for details on each of the trainings:
 - Advanced Mission Planters Training--newly-added for planters in years 2-10 of their plant
 - Facilitating Church Planting Movements--Dr. Ed Stetzer leads two days of training in how to facilitate church planting movements in your sphere of influence.
 - Mission Coach Certification Training--comprehensive training to be a coach who empowers people for mission
 - Behavioral Interviewing Training--practical skills for anyone who selects people for positions
3. More training opportunities coming up. Contact the Center for more info.
 - New Mission Executive Training, Tues-Wed Aug 21-22, 2007, St. Louis
 - Urban Church Planters Institute - Basic, Wed-Fri Sept. 5-7, 2007
 - Daughter Church Planting, September 14-15, 2007, Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN
 - Igniting Congregations Event, October 12-13, 2007, San Diego, CA

Mission Moments, a biweekly electronic newsletter from the Center for U.S. Missions, brings information and encouragement to all who desire to share the God's great love in Jesus Christ with others. The Center for U.S. Missions provides research and training for mission work among unevangelized people in the United States. A partnership of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod World Missions, Concordia University in Irvine, California, and the North America Mission Executives of the LCMS, the Center serves all Christian denominations.

www.centerforusmissions.org
Contact us at office@centerforusmissions.org
1530 Concordia West; Irvine, CA 92612-3299;

949-854-8002 x1780; fax 949-854-6854
Michael Ruhl, Executive Director, mike.ruhl@cu.edu
Glenn Lucas, Director of Training; glenn.lucas@cu.edu
Mike Zehnder, National Worship Consultant; rmike.zehnder@cu.edu
Michelle Connor, Coordinator; michelle.connor@cu.edu
Karen Kogler, Mission Moments editor; karen.kogler@sbcglobal.net

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