

June 2011 CFAMC Devotional Page

The title of Paul Kiler's photograph pretty much says everything that has been on my heart this month to share...

Self-Portrait in Christ's Image, by Paul Kiler



From this beautiful and thought-provoking photograph (which you can find at <http://williamvollinger.com/Kiler-CFAMC.html>), I turn immediately to material graciously submitted by Jesse Ayers about the story of his piece *Jericho*. To me, this story epitomizes what God can do with us and the gifts and talents He has given us while He is making us more and more like Himself... and how His glory more and more can shine through us in the process.

Jericho devotional for CFAMC:

I have been asked by Bill Vollinger and Deeann Mathews to write down my story concerning the composition of my piece *Jericho*. I have been reluctant to do so because I do not want to be writing

about Me (with a capital M). But this is not about me and what I have done; it is about the Lord Jesus taking any of us to a level beyond ourselves.

First I must tell you what happened at the little, independent, Bible church I was attending, for without that, *Jericho* would have never been written.

I am purposely going to avoid ecclesiastical jargon, which I think we sometimes use so that we can think we understand every move that God makes -- "My thoughts are not your thoughts" -- and try to simply report what I experienced without the spin of terminology.

Beginning in 2001 and lasting for three years, our little congregation began to experience some pretty incredible meetings that were totally outside my frame of reference -- and this said by a man who has been in church Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night since cradle roll. What happened was nothing planned by man: there was no change in format or liturgy, no guest speaker whipping up a frenzy, no new music team, no man made agenda, no corporate decision. From the human side, everything was same old, same old, when God began taking over the services. As our pastor said tongue-in-cheek in one meeting, "I guess God thinks this is His church and He can do as he pleases."

At the beginning stages of this season, the atmosphere in the meetings would become very "heavy," a quietness and somberness would come over everyone. Various members would of their own accord fall to their knees, some would sit quietly, some would be weeping, some would lay prostrate on the floor, face down on the carpet before the Lord. (I've spent my life in churches where everyone remains in their seat and "behaves themselves.") Our pastor would forgo his prepared message and have the worship team to continue to play so as to not interfere with the moving of the Spirit of God. If we must have a label, I think "season of repentance" would be pretty accurate.

From this, a season of hilarious joy, such as I have never seen, began to erupt, as various people in the congregation were being set free from emotional wounds and bondages. Folks were no longer politely singing worship songs as "opening exercises" before the sermon. The songs were coming to life in our hearts in a new way. There was a lot of hand clapping, shouts of "Amen" and "Hallelujah" and even (gasp) dancing in the aisles by old, middle-aged stuffshirt folks like me, not the sort of folks that would usually let their dignity go unguarded. We were being set free. I remember one Sunday we were singing a song that has the line "He sets the prisoners free" and a spontaneous cheer went up such as one might hear at a ball game.

I must tell you that I at first was not comfortable with any of this, thinking "Good grief, can't you behave yourselves without all this hoopla?" I remember vividly one Sunday morning thinking, "OK, it's time to find a new church." Then I felt as though God tugged on my sleeve and said "Son, do you really think you're smart enough to know what is of Me and what isn't? If this is My doing, wouldn't you hate to miss out? And if it isn't Me, it will become clear in due course. Why don't you hang around a for little while longer?"

It became the norm for the worship meeting, which begins around 10 a.m., to continue until about 2 or 3 p.m., when we were all finally too tired to sing any longer. During worship, it was common for one

person to leave their place to go pray for someone else, or speak a word of encouragement as God directed them individually. There might be a two or three on the floor here and there, worshiping on their face before God, two or three others in a corner praying over a person, while others where in the aisle dancing as they sung. More than once, rather than a sermon, the Lord would speak to us through 5-6 different members, one by one, who at various times during the meeting would stand up to share something on their heart, or read a Scripture they felt the Lord would have them to read to the body. Though these were all unscripted and unplanned, they had such coherence of direction it seemed clear to us that God was speaking. (And yes, all was tested against Scripture.)

There are several pretty dramatic stories of changed lives from this period, such as wayward adult children of members being delivered from drugs and showing up at church hungry for God, but space here does not permit recounting these stories. But, if you are wondering, "lots of hand clapping and dancing in the aisles, but was anyone becoming more Christ-like" (which is a legitimate question), the answer is a resounding Yes.

That is the background.

During the height of this season at the church, I was eligible for and granted a sabbatical leave, and this time it dawned on me (no doubt at the prompting of the Holy Spirit) to "inquire of the Lord" if there was anything He had in mind for me to write. We were fasting as a church for another reason, but I added to my fast seeking God about what I should write.

I think I really expected the Lord to pat me on the head and say, "run along now and write your little piece; Father is busy managing the universe." That's not what happened, but I need to relate something else first.

I already had three things in mind as I began seeking the Lord, although I was willing to forgo all three and take a different direction if the Lord so directed, but I did talk to the Lord about these:

1. I had in mind to write another surround-sound piece. Mount Carmel, my first large-scale surround-sound work, had been written about 7 years before, and I was pleased with how it was being received by audiences. I thought I should try a variation on that theme. Also, I wanted to write another piece based on a passage of Scripture.
2. I was wondering if there were any way to bring the intense worship experiences we were having at church into a secular concert hall. At the time, that seemed too far beyond the "usual" to be possible, but over the three years of these "manifest presence of God" meetings, we at church had become accustomed to watching God do the seemingly impossible week after week. So, I was wondering about it, or maybe I should say I could dimly see it.
3. The third went like this: "Lord, if there is something in particular you want me to write, let me know. But, I'm getting to be such-and-such an age, and it would be really cool to write something that is cutting-edge, unique, different, something without much precedent." I could not imagine how that was possible after all of the 20th century experimentation,, but it seemed to me in my heart, so I thought I

would ask. Now, being "cutting edge" was *not* my foremost goal, just something in the in the back of my mind.

Through the fasting period, I did not hear anything from the Lord pertaining to my piece. But then, about six weeks later...

I was on the road, driving over to Bowling Green State University for their annual new music festival, and the Lord started speaking to me. There was no audible voice, but rather a thought that came across my mind, that seemed outside of my own natural thought processes, something I would not have thought on my own. He gave me these ideas in very small "chunks," maybe only a word or two at a time, and would then give me an hour or two to digest the concept.

So, driving along (radio and iPod OFF), the word "Jericho" crossed my mind out of the blue. As I pondered it, I could see the potential for using surround-sound percussion (the marching around the wall). And so it went. During the next few days, I was jotting down ideas on motel note pads, the margins of the printed programs from the BGSU concerts, and restaurant napkins.

I was at the now-closed Chi-Chi's in Bowling Green, when the BIG IDEA came. I was eating alone, with stacks of paper napkins at my side on which I had jotted ideas, when I believe the Lord spoke to me: "You know, it says that after the trumpets sounded, the people shouted."

Me: (out loud) "Lord, that won't work! They won't do it!"

People at nearby tables are getting up and moving to distant tables -- "I think that guy over there thinks he's talking to God."

Me: (silently now) "You do not understand concert audiences the way I do. I'm a professional. [not the first time I've said something stupid] Uh, actually, You do, but an audience in a concert hall is not going to shout. We've trained them to sit quietly. They will sit on their hands and refuse cooperate."

God: "Isn't that My business and not yours?"

Me: "Besides that, there won't be a conductor in the country that will touch it."

God" "That's My business, too."

Bottom line: it became clear to me, in this particular instance, that the Lord wanted me to include the shout, and whether or not an audience would participate, and whether or not a conductor would ever perform the piece were beside the point. My job was to be obedient whether I thought the idea would work or not. (Not an uncommon occurrence in the Old Testament - "wait until you hear the sound of marching in the treetops".)

[Fast forward. The piece has been performed over a dozen times around the country, the latest being a performance at a secular university. The audiences always shout enthusiastically, contrary to my

"professional wisdom."]

If you don't know the piece, the last third moves from the Old Testament story of Jericho to words of Jesus from the New Testament, drawing a parallel between the wall of Jericho, a stronghold of the enemy, and the walls and strongholds of The Enemy in our personal lives, walls that Jesus, in His love, wants to tear down in order to free us.

This was NOT my idea at all, but rather was from the Holy Spirit as I was working at the piano. I was prospecting with my fingers for musical ideas when I got the harp arpeggio idea which I used to re-harmonize the first line of "O Come, O Come Emmanuel." As I was playing this, I started singing as though I were the audience, simply repeating the first phrase over and over, sing two bars, rest two bars, and I started hearing various Scriptures in my head during the two bars rest; "Though your sins be as scarlet, I will make you whiter than snow," and "Whom the Son has set free is free indeed."

This grew directly out of my experiences at church, of seeing Christ set one person after the next free of the balls & chains fettering them.

I didn't realize this as I was in the process of composing, but it means the audience is effectively praying, "Come, God be with us," asking God to meet with them, and the narrator is answering with words of Jesus, such as "Come, all who labor and are heavy laden."

I sometimes get a question about one line of narration. The line goes like this: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock ... I knock with the wrecking ball of my love." Obviously, "wrecking ball" is not a quote from Scripture. Again, it was from the church experience, and was a term we coined at church for what appeared to be happening in each of our lives, being "wrecked" by His love. I think there are Scriptural examples, probably the foremost would be Saul on the road to Damascus. In his encounter with the Lord Jesus, was not his former life struck with the wrecking ball of the love and reality of Jesus Christ and broken into a shambles, so that the Lord could rebuild Saul into the Apostle Paul?

Conclusion, or "I said all of that to say this:"

1. God wants to and *can* take us to higher levels of impact than we think ourselves capable. I am no musical genius, and I am certainly no theological genius, but I humbly think *Jericho* is a unique piece, with a concept beyond of what I was capable of dreaming up in the natural, and one that has had a spiritual impact on members of the various audiences. (It is certainly not the only piece that has ever had an impact, but it is among those that have.)

2. There is risk taking involved. I speak here of all areas of life, not just music writing. We cannot play it safe and have impact. David was not playing it safe when he stepped out on faith to face Goliath. Esther was not playing it safe when she stepped into the presence of the King uninvited. Stepping out is probably never "safe." Comfort zones are like harbors, safe places, but ships are built to sail the high seas, storms and all. Of course, the risk I took with *Jericho* was very small in comparison to David or Esther risking their lives, but there was an element of risking professional rejection with the shout. Our pastor could have played it safe and quenched the Spirit to keep the meetings looking "normal," but he

took risks.

3. It probably goes without saying, but I'll say it: surrender to Christ is always necessary. Before surrendering about the "shout," there were some far more important surrenders that I had to make. And, of course, surrender is an ongoing process.

4. It seems to me that God rarely does the same thing twice (one Noah's flood, one Red Sea crossing, one wall of Jericho), so please don't try to use my story as a formula, and do not think I'm offering it as one. Rather, seek God for what He wants to do with you, remembering that its not unusual to be "benched" for a while (how long did Moses spent in the desert before being called to lead God's people out of Egypt? (I am not comparing myself to Moses, only using that as an example.)

May the Lord who tears down the walls of the Enemy and rebuilds the walls of His City, tear down and rebuild in each of us, according to His Kingdom purposes.

Jesse Ayers

Well said, Jesse ... and enough said. See y'all next month, Lord willing.