

Praise: The Peoples' Act

Scripture – [Psalm 66:8-20](#)

When Susan and I were first married, we began the process of trying to find a new church “household” where we could worship and fellowship. We had not yet met Leonard Wiebe, who introduced us to the Mennonite Church, but nonetheless we were engaged in a serious search for a new home. Like Goldilocks and the Three Bears, we tried quite a few different churches as we searched for the one that was just right.

The first church we tried was an American Baptist church. American Baptists are the most progressive group in the Baptist family tree, and so we thought we might find a home there. The church facility was downtown and almost cathedral like in appearance. During the prelude, I could almost feel my heart soaring as the organist played on an amazing pipe organ. Meanwhile, a string quartet played on the platform. The pastor welcomed everyone warmly, gave the call to worship, and then the chorister led the church in a hymn as the organ played. The hymn, I recall, was one of my favorites. But what I recall more than anything else, was how anti-climatic the praise was.

The second church was an inner city Black-American church called Agape Christian Fellowship. I knew the pastor from seminary, and he had invited Susan and me to visit. Before the service started, the congregation shared coffee and cookies in the sanctuary. We were warmly greeted by many people and made to feel at home. When it was time for the service to begin, everyone went and got a folding chair from an adjoining room to sit on during the service (there was not too much sitting though during the service!). The prelude was played on a piano that was missing keys and probably had not been tuned in decades. The worship leader was wearing two different shoes and could not properly pronounce some of the words in the psalm he read for the call to worship. But what he lacked in professional skill, he more than made up for in heart and passion. And when it came time to sing, my oh my... could those folks sing. Was it on key, not really sure since I wouldn't know if it was or was not! But if there is an instrument that can measure the heart, that instrument would have blown up! During the sermon, when a young baby started to cry, they just passed the child around to see who had the magic touch. The person next to me

(opposite Susan!) did not have the touch so she handed the baby to me. I don't think I had held a baby before. Arms locked, straight out, the little guy and I just stared at one another. I don't think he was quite sure what to make of this pale person holding him. The fear led to about thirty seconds of silence. The congregation was impressed, even the pastor paused his sermon to watch curiously. But the peace was short-lived, he started screaming harder than before, the congregation starting laughing, and off to Susan the little guy went!

We stayed at Agape Christian Fellowship for several months, until the church was forced to close. The sanctuary suffered a fire and they could not raise the funds necessary to get the facility up to code. Coincidentally, it was around that time that Leonard Wiebe starting talking to me about Mennonites and the church plant he was pastoring, Peace Community Mennonite Church.

I think what I learned through that experience, is that praise has less to do with the quality of our instruments and more to do with the quality of our hearts and the quality of our bonds with one another. I guess that's why our Zoom worship has exceeded my expectations. The constant is the people.

