

An Act of Worship

By David H. King

One hour to go thought father Steven before walking out of the church vestibule into the church, or stage as it seemed more like to him these days, do I put on a performance for people to laugh and mock he think or do I reach anyone? Maybe today will show because there is real meaning in today's sermon.

Father Steven prays for the strength to carry on through this, his last sermon, as he forces his thin frame out into the church, he asks God for the strength to carry on one last time but five years preaching in this church he reduced him from a courageous, hopeful man to a weak forty year old who feels about seventy.

"Welcome friends" he speaks as hundreds of Sundays before "Before we begin may the appointed take the children to the hall for their teaching"

He waits as the twenty or so children line up along the center aisle of the church led by Glen and Sarah, the last two believers in his church and followed by Jack and Dianne whom, even though they were not believers they did not believe the crap the other parishioners told them. He looks upon these four with great admiration, Glen and Sarah, a young married couple, as they walked with their faith everyday and Jack, a middle aged man, and Dianne, a nineteen year old girl for they both are good people, with this being the case did it really matter that they weren't believers?

Hell, Father Steven thought, it makes them better people than the entire rest of the congregation besides it is the actions not the worship that God is interested in.

He had personally selected these four to take the children this week instead of leaving it up to the congregation to argue over, the strong forcing the weaker willed into doing it. He wished he could have chosen more to take the children, the usual eight would have been nice, but he could not find another nice, let alone good, person amongst the rest of the congregation, these four usually volunteered.

Father Steven motions for the four to approach, he motions for them not to kneel when they reach him. He briefly speaks to them, quietly so not to be heard by the rest of the congregation, 'Look around the church my friends, the congregation have adorned it with donations of paintings of great colors, graven statues, a giant silver crucifix with a golden Jesus, even the chalice they drink from is gold. They are here for the show. I leave you with a reading from the book of Job: These are the men who plan trouble and do evil; their hearts are always full of deceit. Go now good people and may my actions bring you comfort"

Steven smiles as he watches them leave the church with the two lines of children then turns and kneels before the altar, speaking softly again so the congregation once more can not hear "Forgive me father for my sins and the deed I am about to commit, I am not sorry, I believe you know this is a worthy deed." He concludes this statement with a sign of the cross then glances at the clock then turns to the congregation, 50 minutes to go and the show must go on.

"Today is a closed ceremony, any new comers to the church please leave now" he speaks with a touch of regret at the impression he is giving. As watches several families leave he adds, " Do not judge me harshly for later you may approve of my actions, may God be with you"

Father Steven carefully surveys the church to check that no other newcomers have remained and upon seeing only the usual congregation, or usual suspects as he calls them these days, he requests the grounds of the church to be locked to prevent any new comers entering the church during the ceremony. He instructs the congregation that the mass will begin after Brian does this. Whilst he waits for Brian, a mid 50s thin, weasely looking man, he reflects on this man whom does a lot of tasks for the church. How could he so easily have conned the congregation into thinking that he is a good man, are they so blind that they do not see that he does these things and makes sure everybody knows so that he can look good, not just do them because they are simply good things to do and without the attention and praise from making them a public spectacle he would not have done any one of them at all thereby making him unworthy of any of the praise they give him.

He checks the clock again as Brian returns to smiles and looks of admiration for his peers, 45 minutes to go. "Let us begin with the Lord's prayer he says whilst thinking "It's time to put on music, it's time to light the lights, it's time to get things started on the Muppet Show tonight". He hears no emotion, no passion, no anything from them, just empty words, they might as well have been reciting the ingredients of a bottle of ketchup for the amount of belief they have in it, what did he expect from a bunch of people who think that just by going to church on a Sunday and attending one or

two of the groups or the occasional deed for the church makes them good people or better than ones who don't, even those who spend their entire lives doing great things, still it fills up the time.

Following the prayer they sing a hymn, 'Follow me' which the singing group are especially proud of but sing with the equal amount of passion as they recite Lords Prayer, Father Steven sings along with them trying to show enthusiasm whilst trying to hide his contempt of such a cringe worthy display then, with under 35 minutes to go he begins his sermon for the day, he has taken special care over this one as, unknown to them, he intends this to be the last sermon he will ever give. "We are gathered here today truly under the eyes of God and I would like to begin by announcing that this is the last sermon that you will receive from me, for I will soon be leaving this place". He hears gasps from the congregation, not over being sorry that he is leaving, to be honest he felt like he could have been anybody up here for the amount they listened, even somebody who hadn't read the Bible, but having given the gossips something to speculate about. A congregation of gossips and sinners with not one believer amongst them. He waits for the murmuring to die down before continuing.

"Today I am speaking about confession, but do not worry I am not going to speak of your sins but of the act of confession". He can see that this has been met with smiling faces as they think they are going to have lots to talk about after the ceremony, who looked uneasy or guilty and whom they think should be confessing what, idiots.

"The act of confession is for the repentant, people who are truly sorry for what they have done and wish to put it right. It is not for people who have been caught out and think that they should 'fess up' as it were, or for people who know that they have done wrong and think that they can do wrong as by confessing that they will be forgiven by God because this is not so!" He smiles as he sees their faces losing their smiles being replaced by looks of discomfort by his comments, "God sees you all the time, he sees all and knows all and that includes your motivations and beliefs, he forgives only the repentant, he who has sinned and in his heart is truly sorry and would do anything to make amends"

"Could any of you believe that someone who commits a crime against you, apologises, then commits the same crime again was truly sorry for committing it the first time? was that not a lie? shouldn't you have not forgiven that person? God knows the truth behind their actions and did not forgive them!"

The congregation looks worried by this, which reassures him that he is doing the right thing.

"What about the act of attrition?" comes a voice from his right, he recognizes the voice of Ian, the leader of the singing group, a fat balding middle aged know it all whose support of a cause helped lead to research into a very serious, painful and fatal disease to be halted and innocent doctors to be labeled as baby killer, all in the belief that he was doing the right thing, "Surely these are acts we do so that we are forgiven", the speak of the ignorant.

"No Ian, the act of attrition is not for forgiveness, in the confessional we ask for God's forgiveness, do not assume that it is given. The act of attrition is for the repentant, for the repentant person is already punishing themselves for the act they have done as they know they have sinned and that they cannot go back and change it however much they would wish to, the act of attrition is for them to feel that in some small way they have been punished to slightly ease the burden they carry for what they have done. The repentant do not see this as a burden or a chore or in any way putting right their wrong doing, they welcome it as a chance to show God that they are truly sorry and will be thankful for being given the opportunity and you can be sure God knows who is repentant and who is not."

He can see that the congregation are now looking very nervous and are giving him their full attention, which is something he feels he has never had before in the five years he has been preaching here. If only they had listened before or actually read the Bible, which is something that, even though some having attended church for over 30 years, none of them had ever done except reading the odd passage here and there. None of them had actually read it cover to cover, the Bible is a book, how else do you read a book, you read a passage at random from a book you will take it as the passage reads on it's own, not in the context of the entire book, and why not read it, it's a very entertaining book which is easy to read, it's even available in large print and audio book for the poor sighted and blind. No wonder they don't understand.

"And on judgment day when one is taken to the Promised Land and one is not, the repentant shall be the one who is taken." He pauses at the end of this sentence to take in the uncomfortable looks on the faces of the congregation, yes, he thinks, I know what you have been saying in the confessional and there is not one repentant amongst you, only sinners and some very sick ones amongst you and the people who condone your actions by forgiving them whilst not showing them the error of their ways. How conveniently the entire congregation have either missed or dismissed that passage, even though he has read it and spoken about it numerous times during his sermons.

"Now let us pray, Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord be with thee..." He checks the clock again as they join in reciting the prayer, under 25 minutes to go.

As the prayer finishes he begins the act of communion, blessing the bread and the wine and offering them all the time wondering who actually hears the voice of God when they say "Lord I am not worthy to receive you but only say the word and I shall". He has seen more worthy people in prisons.

Nervousness starts to creep over him as they line up in two rows down the central aisle of the church as he knows his show is drawing near to an end, he can only hope that they think that he is leaving because he has lost his faith, his faith is actually stronger than it ever has been, otherwise they might notice his contempt and disgust for them.

They come forward two by two to receive the bread and wine symbolizing the body and blood of Jesus, the bread from him and the wine from his two altar servers, especially chosen by him today as well, the sickest of his entire congregation, he is sickened by the willingness of all the others to accept the wine from these two people as he knows many of them are aware of the things these two have done and are still doing and have not done anything to stop them, thereby condoning their actions, some of them have even accepted unrepentant apologies, call themselves Christians, they don't even know the meaning of the word.

He waits as the last to receive the communion file back to their benches, any uncertainty he had has now gone. Father Steven is certain that he is doing the right thing.

He smiles as the music begins for the final hymn, a hymn entitled "Happy the man", he has selected this hymn as it is one that Ian, the leader of the singing group, altered slightly from a little known hymn his old school hymn book and received much praise from his creativity and passion. He looks at the expression on Ian's face go from pride from the praise that he has received to horror as he looks at the hymn sheet and realizes that Father Steven has not just given the congregation the original version but noted whom and when it was written.

He checks the clock again at the end of the hymn, only 10 seconds remaining now.
"Before we depart offer each other the sign of peace"

8 seconds, 7...

He realizes that a hand of one of the altar servers is stretched out towards him offering him the sign and expecting him to return it. He just stares in shock that this man might think he would do such a thing.

6 seconds, 5....

"Father" questions the owner of the hand.

4 seconds, 3...
"You?" he replies

2....
Never he thinks before adding "Screw you!"

1....
Father Steven smiles as the bomb he has placed under the altar explodes.

Glen, Sarah, Jack and Dianne, the four people chosen to accompany the children for the teaching, come running out of the hall across the road from the church, after instructing the children to stay and continue their tasks, at the sound of the explosion and look on in horror at the mass of rubble which used to be the church strewn all across the grounds, the road, some almost being thrown as far as the door to the hall nearly a thousand yards away.

After a few moments Glen speaks "I forgive you Father." Dianne turns to him and replies "What for, it was a good deed."