

Seeing and Hearing God's Glory, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 23081019ORGAN
Exodus 33:12-23 and Psalm 98
Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 19 October, 2008

We are not worshipping the organ, even though it has been moved to the center of the chancel. God is the center of our worship, but how do we get a handle on God's greatness? A large, high-ceilinged room with tall windows to let in the light. Words from the holy scriptures to tell the story of a people. A communion table and a cross to explain God's immanence. The sound of the mighty organ to proclaim God's transcendence. Few human-made instruments can match the pipe organ in proclaiming the glory of God. Today, we have moved the organ from the background to the foreground.

Our Hebrew Testament reading comes just after the Israelites had a wild party dancing around a golden calf that they had Aaron cast from their gold. Both Moses and God were pretty angry with the people for impatiently doing such a stupid thing. Moses wanted some reassurance that God would still accompany this rebellious people, so he and God had a conversation. Moses asked God, "Now if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight."¹ Moses said, "Show me your glory, I pray."²

God said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you," [but you can't see all my glory, because you wouldn't live! I'll protect you in the cleft of a rock] until I have passed by, then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back."³

We have the organ to give us a taste of the glory of God. The organ has the ability to lift us through the range of human emotions. It evokes feelings. The organ, of all instruments, is most closely matched to the range of the human voice.

The organ made its way into Christian worship sometime during the Middle Ages, when it moved from the courts of emperors into cathedrals. The finest early-medieval organ builders were monks, including one of them who went on to become a pope, Pope Silvester II (999-1003 AD).

These medieval organ-building monks, together with some of the theologians of that era, began to think of the organ, with all of its wondrous mechanical and tonal complexity harnessed together into a single totality of sound—these medieval monks and theologians began to think of the organ as an earthly embodiment of "cosmic harmony," as an earthly embodiment of the relatedness and interconnectedness of the vast diversity of being....So it is that we find an early 12th-century bishop in Brittany named Baldric writing: "...we regard [organs] as mysteries and derive from them a spiritual harmony; it is this harmony that [God] the Moderator of all things has instilled in us, by putting together elements entirely discordant in themselves and binding them together by a harmonious rhythm.... As we listen to the organ, let us be drawn together by a two-fold charity [of love—by love for God and love for neighbor]."⁴

¹Exodus 33:13

²Exodus 33:18

³Exodus 33:22-23

⁴ Quoted in Quentin Faulkner, "The History of the Organ in the Christian Church," in *Music and the Arts in Christian Worship*, volume 4, book 1 of *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, ed. Robert E. Webber (Nashville: Star Song, 1994), p. 399. Other material in this

So today, in celebrating the International Year of the Organ, we celebrate God, God's gifts to us, and our love for one another.

We take the organ for granted, here at ECC. We have a beautiful organ. We have talented organists, and I speak not only of Mark Rumley who is of the highest caliber of detail and precision, and devotion to God, but also of Ken Sheldon who often substitutes on the organ.

We are truly blessed. Talented organists are rare, as are organs themselves these days. They have been cast aside in many congregations for less expensive drums, guitars, Compact Discs, and recorded music.

You have been reminded this morning of all of the various ways in which the organ enhances our worship and praise of God. May this organ always serve to help us proclaim the Reign of God over our lives and over all of creation. May it serve to comfort us in our sorrow and to humble us when we become haughty.

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!

section of the sermon is also drawn from Faulkner.