

FaithBIT



The Sanctuary Was Empty

Reflection by Lori Hanken

The sanctuary was mostly empty. A full-sized figure of Martin Luther sat in the back. Our chairs were separated so that we could still practice "social distancing." It was very surreal. I would even say awkward at first. I was a little self-conscious (if you know me, that is not me - at all!) and a little anxious. It felt like a HUGE responsibility to be there sharing God's word to all the people that no longer can come to church. Little did I know that I was the one to be blessed.

Like many churches, we use Holden's Evening Prayer for Lenten services. I know the music and the words by heart. But last night. Those words. Oh, those words. As the service continued, I was overwhelmed by a sense of peace, love and awe. Those words seemed so much more powerful. Maybe I had been forgetting lesson #2 (see below). It is so easy to go through the motions during a church service. Not last night. Those words washed over me. There is Hope. There is Peace. There is Joy. There is Love.

"Jesus Christ you are the Light of the world; the Light no darkness can overcome; Stay with us now for it is evening, and the day is almost over. Let your Light scatter the darkness and shine within your people here. Joyous Light of heav'nly glory, loving glow of God's own face, you who sing creation's story, shine on every land and race. Now as evening falls around us, we shall raise our songs to you, God of daybreak, God of shadows, come and light our hearts anew. In the stars that grace the darkness, in the blazing sun of dawn, in the light of peace and wisdom, we can hear your quiet song."

And, oh so powerful...

"Love that fills the night with wonder, love that warms the weary soul, love that burst all chains asunder, set us free and make us whole."

It continues....

"You who made the heaven's splendor, ev'ry dancing star of night, make us shine with gentle justice, let us each reflect your light."

I sang with every part of my heart and soul the canon that followed. After worship was over, I found out that family members and many others were watching and singing along. How powerful is that? Satan has no hold.

"Let my prayer rise up, like incense before you, the lifting up of my hands as an offering to you. O God, I call to you, come to me now; O hear my voice when I cry to you. Keep watch within me God; deep in my heart may the light of your love be burning bright. All praise to the God of all - Creator of life; all praise be to Christ and the spirit of love."



“When the service was over, we all felt it. We knew we really had just experienced something truly special.”
- **Lori Hanken**

In my work with Holy Commotion, the youth Confirmation band at Immanuel, I only want them to learn two things from me:

#1 Being a worship leader is all about giving glory to God through music. It is not about your own glory or about your musical talents. It is giving of your time and talents to glorify God.

#2 Really hearing and feeling the words while sharing worship music.

Last night, I felt both those lessons so dramatically it made me cry.

So, maybe this is a good thing. We cannot hide behind our church walls anymore. We cannot be safe together in a sanctuary. We need to worship where we are. All day. Every day. This situation has already taught me many things and I am sure I will continue to learn and grow as a person through this process.

When the service was over, we all felt it. We knew we really had just experienced something truly special. I read the comments from the live stream when I got home. Families worshiping by candlelight at home, people from afar joining us, taking communion on their sofa, worshiping against all odds. It was such a blessing to me.