

**“Come and See What God is Doing”**  
a message by Dr. Bruce Havens  
**BASED ON THE THEME, “YOU CAN SEE IT WORKING”**  
**Arlington Congregational Church, U.C.C.**  
**November 1, 2009**

**Psalm 66 [ NRSV ]**

<sup>1</sup>Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;  
<sup>2</sup>sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise.  
<sup>3</sup>Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds!  
Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you.  
<sup>4</sup>All the earth worships you; they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name.”  
<sup>5</sup>Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.  
<sup>6</sup>He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot.  
There we rejoiced in him, <sup>7</sup>who rules by his might forever,  
whose eyes keep watch on the nations— let the rebellious not exalt themselves.  
<sup>8</sup>Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard,  
<sup>9</sup>who has kept us among the living, and has not let our feet slip.  
<sup>10</sup>For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried.  
<sup>11</sup>You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs;  
<sup>12</sup>you let people ride over our heads;  
we went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.  
<sup>13</sup>I will come into your house with burnt offerings; I will pay you my vows,  
<sup>14</sup>those that my lips uttered and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.  
<sup>15</sup>I will offer to you burnt offerings of fatlings, with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams;  
I will make an offering of bulls and goats.  
<sup>16</sup>Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me.  
<sup>17</sup>I cried aloud to him, and he was extolled with my tongue.  
<sup>18</sup>If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.  
<sup>19</sup>But truly God has listened; he has given heed to the words of my prayer.  
<sup>20</sup>Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer  
or removed his steadfast love from me.

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**H**ave you ever gone to a 3-D movie? I haven't been to one recently but I remember putting on those glasses and suddenly jerking my head back when things seemed to pop off the screen. I imagine if you were sitting in the back and watching that phenomena it would be kind of amusing.

I think a lot of people need to get some 3-D God glasses. They have a one-dimensional God. Their God is flat,

narrow, powerless, and maybe not much of a god at all. Others have a powerful God but their God is like a fright movie character – something to fear but not something to love. Their God is distorted by looking through the wrong lens. I want to offer you a different look. I want to invite you to see God by looking at the awesome things God has done and is doing, see all of God's glory and then make your decisions about how to live faithfully.

The Psalmist says, “Come and see what God has done; he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.” But a lot of people aren’t looking and a lot of others can’t see it because they are looking at other things, or they are looking for other things. So this morning I want to invite you to consider what you are looking for and what you are looking through and what a difference it makes when you can see the awesome deeds of God at work.

So what are you looking for in life and what are you looking through? Most of us here are looking through some form of faith. We have chosen to let our assumptions about God shape our lives to one degree or another. If we assume God provides security then we want things safe and we want God to protect us from harm or even illness. If we assume God will provide for us then we expect not to suffer from poverty or want. There are a lot of other expectations that our theology may have of God.

When we look at what the Psalm proclaims then we see some of this but perhaps much more. The Psalm writer mixes praise and proclamation. He calls on us to join in worshiping God and reminds his listener of the mighty things God has done. We don’t know the occasion of the writing of this Psalm but it almost sounds like it was written after God had brought the Israelites out of Egypt and across the Red Sea. The writer almost crows with victory saying God’s enemies cringe before him. God had turned the sea into dry land – clearly

a reference to the crossing of the Red Sea. He reminds his listener that God keeps watch on the nations, a subtle reminder that those who do injustice must answer to God. The writer even admits that God had tried and tested them and had laid burdens on their backs. But he confirms that God “brought us out to a spacious place.” The writer was looking for a reason to praise God and was looking through the lens of trust.

If we want to be able to see what God has done we too must look for reasons to praise and we must look through the lens of trust. If you are struggling in your relationship with God I would suggest that these two attitudes can make all the difference. First, like the Psalm writer, we must look back and search for reasons to praise God. It isn’t that God needs our praise, or that praising God will some how flatter God into being kind to us. It is about the way that praise works to change our hearts and our perspective.

If our hearts are filled with resentment, if we are focused on the problems in our lives then we won’t be able to see God at work. We will be so overwhelmed we will be unable to allow God’s power to work through us to transform us. Just this past week on the Today show they interviewed a woman who was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis just one month after her wedding. *“When Cami Walker found out she had multiple sclerosis, she became depressed, sleepless and was in constant pain. Then an old friend offered some*

*advice: Stop thinking about yourself, stop dwelling on your pain, and start giving. She gave her a prescription. She told her to give away 29 gifts in 29 days. In her book, "29 Gifts," she chronicles her giving cycle and explains how it altered her perception of her situation. The giving cycle couldn't cure her condition, but she was no longer too tired (or too bitter) to live her life.*"[ from Today.com ]. Her symptoms have become almost non-existent and she is continuing to give gifts daily as a way to live a life of meaning and purpose.

Her story really defines what it means to be a steward. These next few weeks we are going to be talking about stewardship. This is always the time that Christians dread going to church because the pastor will be talking about money. And I will talk a little about money because the church does need money to do the things we say we want to do as a church. But I want to talk about giving and money for a more important reason. I want to talk about giving and money because you and I need to give. It is essential to our make – up. God made us to be givers and because of that we have a need to give. So I want to encourage you to come each of these next three weeks because I want to give you some gifts that can transform your life. If you have friend who is having a hard time in life I want you to invite them to come too, not because I want their money, but because I want to give them these same gifts. I want to show you how as stewards we have a precious gift from God and we can either use it and experience great

blessing or we can ignore it and wonder why our lives feel so incomplete.

So let me get back to why I think Cami experienced something that is essential for us to know as stewards, as Christians, as those looking to see what God has done. I don't even know if Cami is a Christian – from the part of her book I have been able to read so far she is not. But that is not important. What is important is that she discovered that how you look at life, what you look for and what your look through determine your life, your health, your sense of security and peace and joy and hope more than anything else. You might say that you and I have the power to set our "joy meter" in life. That is part of what a steward finds.

A steward is one who manages. Originally a steward managed the pigsty for his master. It is where the word comes from – sty-ward means manager of the sty. In other words a steward took care of the owner's property. But more than that a steward made his living by being an effective, one might even say, creative manager of what the owner puts in his or her care. So it is with us and God. God has put our lives in our care, but our lives and everything in them are essentially owned by God – God simply invites us to use everything in our power to be effective, creative managers of our lives.

If our lives are in crisis because of some circumstance then we must find ways to manage that situation rather than letting it manage us. If we look at life through the lens of praising God and

trusting God then we will have a power to face that crisis beyond our own. God invites us to discover that giving ourselves away is the way to have what we want most. Jesus put it this way, “He [or she] who would save his life must give it away.”

The Psalmist says, “I will come into your house with ... offerings; I will pay you my vows.” In short the Psalm writer knows that the greatest way to live life is through praising God and trusting that God wants to bless us. Rather than fearing God’s wrath, wondering why God is punishing because something in our life isn’t going well, the Psalm invites us to praise and celebrate what God has done and is doing.

So here is what we must ask ourselves – is our God big enough to praise and trust, and is our faith big enough to praise and trust God. Some people try to narrow God down to a little one-dimensional God. They have an exclusive God. In fact this past week the Episcopal Bishop of South Carolina was bemoaning that some churches have an “indiscriminate inclusivity.” He was worried that some churches are letting in people he thinks God wouldn’t approve of.

I have to tell you I want God to use that label about me. I want a church that practices indiscriminate inclusivity. You know I don’t understand the kind of Christianity that sounds like it was invented by that guy Hootie who used to run the Augusta National Country Club. You know their version of the church

and of heaven sounds like that. The only people really welcome are white, straight Protestant men whose handicap is lower than four.

I’m looking for a bigger God. I want to see the awesome deeds of God just to have another reason to celebrate. There hasn’t been enough reason to celebrate lately has there? What with the economy, the war in Afghanistan, the fuss about the health insurance bill. I like people who call out, “Come and see what God has done!” And then they show me something or tell me something about what God has done for them. It isn’t bragging, its what we used to call testifying. It isn’t about how great we are, it is about how great our God is.

By faith I have come to see a 3-D God, not a one-dimensional flat, little, narrow God. I have come to see God who not only *has* done great things, but *is* doing awesome deeds. I have come to see a God who is still speaking, who is still calling people to come and see and to praise and trust. I have come to see a God who knows that when we give, we find our lives transformed. That is one of the gifts that I want to give you this morning. It is in fact a gift God has given us. Praise and trust allow us to see these things. I invite you to come and see what God has done, and is doing. Amen.

"Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.'"

Acts 10:34-43