

This is my sermon from Sunday, July 31st, 2002, delivered at Living Lord Lutheran Church in Vero Beach, FL. The occasion was the retirement of the church's musician, Pamela Wilcox. This is the manuscript from that sermon.

Introduction and Background

The gospel for Sunday, July 31, 2022 comes from the 12th Chapter of Luke's Gospel. Jesus and his disciples are on the move again, and someone from the crowd asks Jesus to serve as an arbitrator to settle a property dispute between himself and his brother. And Jesus spoke a parable about a rich man, whose farm had produced abundant crops, and he thought he had no place to store his large harvest, which took up more room than his current barns could handle. So he told himself he would tear down his barns and build larger ones so that he could store more of his grain. Jesus ends up telling the man that his life would be demanded of him that very evening, criticizing him for storing up such large treasures on earth. And he tells the man that those who store up treasures for themselves, but are not rich toward God are not living lives worthy of the Kingdom of God. Ouch!

Message

So the gospel for this Sunday (July 31st, 2022) is about a rich man, a successful farmer, wanting to store up treasures on earth (his grain), and Jesus challenging him about what it means to be rich toward God.

So let's see, this may not be exact, but I'm betting I'm getting pretty close. 60+ years as a church musician, times 50 Sundays per year, with a couple of weeks off each year - that's 3,000 Sundays in the "air chair." Then there's Christmas Eve worship, Easter, Holy Week, Lenten worship services, midweek Advent worship services. Add those up, that's probably another 1,000 worship services. So I'd say this Sunday, your final Sunday as a church musician marks the end for you of more than 4,000 times you have sat in the air chair in a church directing its music. The term "air chair", meaning sitting at the organ, piano, keyboard and such.

Add to that funerals, memorial services, special musical offerings like recitals and the like, and that number probably gets to somewhere around 4,500 services or so. Probably more. But who's counting, right? Think of all the choirs, bell choirs, soloists, youth choirs and other groups that you've served with and loved over the years, and add to this the number of hours of choir practice, bell choir practice and more.

It's hard to get an exact number but I'll take a stab. 60 years times 30 weeks, counting summers off times two hours per week that's 3,600 hours spent directing church music. And then there are the pastors you've served with, the joys and the challenges that go with that. Last minute changes, the missteps, the truly inspirational preaching, and the not so inspirational preaching you've heard over the years. On top of that add the worship music committee meetings you've conducted and attended, church council meetings, special congregation meetings, and other meetings. And not counting all the practice time at home, getting your music ready for the upcoming Sunday worship service. We never see this time that the church musician devotes to his or her craft often

at home, or at times when no one is in the church. We just assume it all sort of happens.

Then think of all the people who have sat in the church pews over the years, and have felt, and heard the gospel message through your music. Tens of thousands over the years no doubt. That's tens of thousands of people whom your music has impacted, inspired, comforted. Tens of thousands of people who heard the gospel through your music. Not just at the Sunday service, but for memorial services funerals, and the like. Hard to wrap your mind around it all.

We clergy often commiserate about what impact, if any, of our work has on the people we serve - whether what we say and do in this public office makes any difference in people's lives. And I'm guessing you've asked yourself that same question as well over the years. What difference has my music made in the lives of those whom I've served over the years and in my church?

I'm here to tell you Pam, that it has made a profound difference in the lives of many people, whether or not they ever told you so. I witness it in the fact that two families in the congregation have asked that you deliver the music at the memorial services for their loved ones this fall, after your retirement. They want you to come back one last time because of their love for and respect of your music. That's how much your music has impacted all of us.

We are grateful that God saw fit to call you to this congregation nearly 7 years ago, and that you said "yes" to this call. It has been a blessing for both of us, for you and for us. And we thank you for your service to and love of your church. I will miss our Sunday morning routine, long before worship begins, when we share jokes, catch up on personal stuff, fix the music boards, rehearse our music together, laugh, cry, and so much more.

And now, it ends. You're calling as a church musician formally ends today. You've earned the right to retire, to relax a little bit on Sunday mornings, to sleep in every now and then. You've earned the right to transition to a new role, yet to be determined by you.

You've already had one big transition in your life recently, and that was from wife to widow. And now, on top of that, another transition, from church musician to congregant. Another new role for you. Where will you sit Sunday morning? We'll all be watching that very closely! What role will you play in the life of this congregation going forward? What's it going to be like rolling into the church at 9:50 am instead of 7:30 on Sunday morning? I envy you on that one! Will you sing in the church choir? What if you're nominated to be council president?

And I know that it will all be bittersweet for you as you transition once again. But know this. That through this next transition, just as the last one, your church will be here for you. Your church will continue to love and support you, and walk with you through this transition.

So now to paraphrase what Saint Paul writes in 2nd Timothy - you have fought the good fight; you have finished the race; you have kept the faith. For you, Paul would say, there is reserved the crown of righteousness.

So enter into the next phase of your life with confidence knowing that you have done these things well, and that what lies ahead, whatever that looks like, your God, and your church, will walk with you.

God has richly blessed you in your life. You are wealthy beyond imagination because you are a child of God. You have shared your musical treasures with others and lives were changed for the better for it. And yes your life has been rich toward God.

And so I say as I face the congregation this morning, if you want to see a living example of what it means to be “rich toward God”, you need to look no further than the life and service of Pamela Wilcox. Amen, thanks be to God.

The Rev. Gregory Shreaves
July 31st, 2022