



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

April 28, 2019

Jump Start # 2296

Genesis 4:5 "but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell."

We were off to the orchestra over the weekend. The selections were all Italian. It was themed as a "Tour of Italy." I enjoy going, but it's not like my wife. She truly understands music. She hears themes and transitions and can see what the composer was trying to portray. For me, I hear the music, but I look at the different color of stains on the violins and wonder about that. I see who is there and who is missing. I watch them turn the pages of music. There was countenance that grabbed my attention and made me think of our verse today.

Countenance is not one of those everyday words. We might call it an expression. Our verse tells us that the countenance of Cain fell. The ESV states that Cain's face fell. The NIV says his face was downcast. We might say that he was looking rather sad.

Supposedly, someone recommended a person for appointment by Abraham Lincoln. The President refused, stating that he did not like the man's face. He can't help the way he looks, the person responded. Lincoln said, everyone over forty is responsible for the way their face looks. Don't know if that was a true conversation, but it is about countenance.

At the concert the other evening, there was a young viola player. He was sitting across from the conductor. You couldn't miss him. And, what you really couldn't miss was that he was smiling. Not just now and then, and not just when folks were applauding. He was smiling all the time. He smiled at the beginning of a piece, through some tough middle pieces and at the end. He didn't just do that for the first piece, but through the entire concert. I was watching. I was watching him a lot. I notice no one else was smiling. The rest had serious looks on their faces. They were playing well and didn't want to miss a note. Some smiled at the end when they stood for applause, but for many, it looked like a long day at work. That is, everyone but my viola player. He sure was happy to be there. He was happy to be playing. His countenance made me smile back at him.

In our verse today, God rejected Cain's offering. It wasn't right. Cain didn't really make a sacrifice. You pull a tomato off a plant, there will be plenty more on that same plant. Cain made a donation, not a sacrifice. Able offered a lamb. That lamb wasn't coming back. That's the nature of true sacrifices, it's one way.

Have you ever opened a present and it was something you really did not like or want? We often try to cover it with a nice thank you, but inside we are thinking, I'll never use that. Never. God didn't want what Cain offered, which reminds us that just because we like it doesn't mean that God does. The modern world has the notion that God will take any and everything we give Him in worship. Folks that say that must have missed this passage in their reading. God didn't accept what Cain offered.

Cain got angry. It was his fault. It was his choice. It was his offering. And, it is here that his face fell. His countenance changed. Gloom and doom filled his face. He wasn't smiling like my viola player. His face reflected how he felt on the inside, miserable.

(OVER)

A smiling countenance-that made me think.

I wonder if we preachers look angry when we preach. We're preaching the Gospel which is good news, but by the looks of our face, you'd never know that. Maybe we scare people by the way we look.

I wonder if shepherds look angry or sad. Could it be that some are afraid to talk to elders simply because of the way that they look.

All of my sons can lead singing. They learned music from their mother. When the youngest leads, he smiles. He looks so happy up there. Whether he realizes it or not, he lifts the spirit of others just by his countenance.

Now, here are some things I learned from my smiling viola player.

First, we choose our countenance. There are certainly times to be serious, sober and about the business of the Lord. Playing classical music is pretty serious stuff. Yet, my guy was smiling. Even though you are engaged in tough work, you can enjoy it. We talked to a couple of the musicians out in the parking lot afterwards. Our words were, "great job, wonderful performance." Which it was. Had I met my viola man, I would have said something like, "You really like what you are doing. It shows." Do others want to preach, or, lead God's people from what they see in us? Are we the smiling Christian?

Second, your countenance doesn't have to reflect that of others. That was certain at the concert. Everyone was so serious, except one. Foreheads wrinkled, eyes intense, nearly frowning, that is but one. Guess which one? My viola player. He was smiling. Head up. Eyes darting about. So, I don't have to let others set the tone for me. Monday at work is painful for most. The long weekend, the wrong choices, the drudgery of work, and it's a pitiful time. But you don't have to feel that way. You don't have to look that. In fact, some may even say, "What are you so happy about?" Great question. Simple answer. Happy to be alive. Happy to be able to honor God. Happy to be loved. Happy to be needed. They don't want to hear that. They want misery. Terrible weather. Traffic a mess. Complain. Grumpy, dumpy, and miserable. Not many smiles on Monday morning.

Third, your countenance is contagious. I've been overseas several times. I been in places where I have no idea what people are saying. India, Germany, Italy-I've seen it every time. I may not know what they are saying and they certainly have no idea what I am saying, but when I smile, they return a smile. Smiles cross international borders. A smile can calm worried hearts. A smile can lower the stress. A smile can get others smiling. You can set the temperature of your home and of the church simply by carrying a wonderful smile. You can make people glad to be there. You can make folks feel welcome and accepted. When one smiles, you want to stick around. When one smiles, you want to come back. A smiling church can do more an a month of sermons. Smiles are warm, inviting and inclusive.

Finally, you and I have a lot to smile about. Sure this world is crazy. Certainly things are out of hand and this nation is turning it's back on God and becoming more secular. You can focus upon those things, or you can see what God has for you. You are blessed, loved and forgiven by God. He has a place awaiting you in Heaven. It won't be long and we'll be out of this place. You and I get to sing to God. You and I get to tell others about the Lord. His precious word is in our hands and hearts. It's not locked up in some far away museum. It's not saved only for a few privileged people. Weekly we get to worship God. Daily we get to talk to God. Someday we'll get to see God's face. And, on top of that, God knows us. He knows our name. He knows our story. That's more than we can say about a lot of places we go. The President doesn't know me. The Governor doesn't know me. There may be some even in your congregation that don't really know you. But God does.

Boy, that ought to put a smile on our faces. I wonder when God looks down upon this world if He sees a frowning multitude that it entrenched in sin and lost with no direction or hope. But, here and there He a smiling face. It's one of His children. They are marching to Zion, happily, joyously, lovingly.

How's your countenance? Look deep in your heart, that ought to put a change on your face.

Roger Shouse (Used by permission)
