

Philippians 3:10-14

August 27, '17

**SECULAR SONGS THAT SPEAK TO THE SOUL
“I STILL HAVEN’T FOUND WHAT I’M LOOKING FOR”**

NEARLY 40 YEARS AGO, A YOUNG MAN NAMED DIK EVANS TOLD HIS FOUR BANDMATES THAT HE WAS QUITTING THEIR GROUP CALLED “THE HYPE” TO FORM HIS OWN BAND.

THE REMAINING MEMBERS OF THE HYPE – INCLUDING DIK’S YOUNGER BROTHER DAVE - QUICKLY ARRANGED A CONCERT FOR THE PURPOSE OF SAYING FAREWELL TO DIK AND ALLOWING HIS NEW BAND TO PERFORM AT THE SAME CONCERT.

AS THE HYPE CONCLUDED THEIR SHOW, THEY TOLD THE AUDIENCE DIK WAS LEAVING THEM & AFTER HIS NEW BAND PERFORMED, THEY WOULD RETURN TO THE STAGE UNDER A NEW NAME & PERFORM ALL ORIGINAL SONGS – SOMETHING THEY’D NEVER DONE.

AS PROMISED, WHEN DIK’S BAND FINISHED, LARRY MULLEN JR., ADAM CLAYTON, PAUL HEWSON & DAVE EVANS RETURNED TO THE STAGE AND INTRODUCED THEMSELVES TO THAT SMALL CROWD AS U2.

THAT CONCERT WAS HELD ON DECEMBER 17, 1977 IN THE FELLOWSHIP HALL OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN HOWTH, IRELAND.

THOSE SAME FOUR INDIVIDUALS ARE STILL PLAYING TOGETHER 40 YEARS LATER AS U2.

PAUL HEWSON BECAME BONO & DAVE EVANS – DIK’S YOUNGER BROTHER - BECAME THE EDGE, BUT FOR 40 YEARS THE FOUR OF THEM HAVE MANAGED TO REMAIN TOGETHER AS A BAND – A BAND

THAT HAS BEEN AWARDED 22 GRAMMYS – MORE THAN ANY OTHER BAND.

THEY’VE BEEN FEATURED ON THE COVER OF TIME MAGAZINE AND NEARLY 30 YEARS AGO, ROLLING STONE CALLED THEM “*THE ONLY BAND THAT MATTERS.*”

IN THIS SERIES – “*SECULAR SONGS THAT SPEAK TO THE SOUL*” – WE’RE REALLY JUST PICKING OUT ONE SONG THAT IS REPRESENTATIVE OF A MUCH GREATER BODY OF WORK.

IN THE CASE OF U2 – UNQUESTIONABLY MORE THAN WITH ANY OTHER POPULAR MUSICAL ARTIST - YOU COULD PICK OUT VIRTUALLY ANY SONG THEY’VE EVER RECORDED & FIND A SPIRITUAL MESSAGE THAT WOULD SPEAK TO THE SOUL.

THE BAND REALLY STARTED WHEN 14-YEAR OLD LARRY MULLEN PUT AN AD IN THE SCHOOL NEWSPAPER IN DUBLIN, IRELAND, ASKING FOR A GUITAR PLAYER TO HELP HIM FORM A BAND.

SHORTLY AFTER THAT FIRST CONCERT THEY PLAYED AS U2, THREE OF THE FOUR MEMBERS BECAME HEAVILY INVOLVED WITH A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY THAT WENT BY THE NAME OF “SHALOM.”

MULLEN, THE EDGE & BONO COMMITTED THEIR LIVES TO CHRIST & THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR FAITH BECAME NEARLY AS CONSUMING AS THEIR MUSIC.

AS THEY BEGAN RECORDING & IT APPEARED AS THOUGH THEY MIGHT ACTUALLY MAKE IT IN THE WORLD OF MUSIC, SOME OF THE MEMBERS OF THE “SHALOM” COMMUNITY WARNED THEM THAT THEY COULDN’T HAVE IT BOTH WAYS.

THEY COULDN’T BE PART OF A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY & ALSO BE PLAYING SECULAR MUSIC.

IT WAS STRONGLY SUGGESTED THAT THEY HAD TO MAKE A CHOICE – THEY COULD EITHER ABANDON THE IDEA OF A CAREER IN THE MUSIC WORLD & FOCUS ON PLAYING CHRISTIAN MUSIC IN THE CHURCH OR ABANDON THEIR FAITH BECAUSE THE TWO WORLDS WERE INCOMPATIBLE.

THEY WENT THROUGH AN AGONIZING STRUGGLE.

THEY KNEW THEY HAD COMMITTED THEIR LIVES TO CHRIST BUT THEY ALSO LOVED PLAYING MUSIC & THEY LOVED PLAYING MUSIC THAT PEOPLE OUTSIDE OF THE CHURCH WANTED TO HEAR.

FORTUNATELY, GOD LED U2 INTO A THIRD WAY – MAINTAINING THEIR DEEP COMMITMENT TO CHRIST WHILE, AT THE SAME TIME, COMPOSING, RECORDING & PERFORMING MUSIC THAT COULD TOUCH THE SECULAR WORLD IN A DEEPLY SPIRITUAL FASHION.

AN ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE NEW YORKER NOT LONG AGO WHERE THE WRITER MADE A STATEMENT THAT SHOWS HOW DIFFICULT IT STILL IS FOR PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND THIS SEEMINGLY STRANGE MARRIAGE BETWEEN CHRISTIAN FAITH & SECULAR MUSIC.

HE CALLED U2 “*A SEMI-SECRETLY CHRISTIAN ROCK BAND.*”

ANYONE WHO KNOWS U2 AT ALL KNOWS THERE’S NOTHING “SEMI-SECRET” ABOUT THEIR CHRISTIAN FAITH!

FOR MORE THAN 30 YEARS, COLLEGES & SEMINARIES HAVE OFFERED CLASSES IN THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF U2 SONGS.

FOR MANY YEARS, ALL ACROSS THE WORLD, CHURCHES HAVE PRESENTED WHAT ARE CALLED “U2CHARISTS” – WORSHIP SERVICES BASED ENTIRELY ON THE MUSIC OF U2.

IN THE PAST DECADE, MORE THAN A DOZEN BOOKS HAVE BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT THEIR FAITH WITH TITLES LIKE – WALK ON – THE

SPIRITUAL JOURNEY OF U2, ONE STEP CLOSER: WHY U2 MATTERS FOR THOSE SEEKING GOD, PREACHING THE U2 CATALOG AND THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO U2.

BONO, THE LEAD SINGER OF U2 AND THE GROUP'S PRIMARY SPOKESPERSON, HAS AN UNCANNY ABILITY TO MAKE UNEQUIVOCAL STATEMENTS ABOUT HIS CHRISTIAN FAITH WITHOUT TURNING OFF PEOPLE *OUTSIDE* OF FAITH WHILE AT THE SAME TIME NOT COZYING UP TOO CLOSELY TO THOSE *WITHIN* THE FAITH.

CONSIDER AN EXCHANGE HE HAD WITH A FRIEND & AUTHOR THAT ENDED UP IN A BOOK ENTITLED CONVERSATIONS WITH BONO.

THE FRIEND, MYCHKA ASSAYAS IS NOT A CHRISTIAN & BONO TALKS TO HIM ABOUT JESUS AS THE SON OF GOD.

ASSAYAS SAYS – *“THE SON OF GOD WHO TAKES AWAY THE SINS OF THE WORLD. I WISH I COULD BELIEVE IN THAT.”*

BONO RESPONDS – *“THE POINT OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST IS THAT CHRIST TOOK ON THE SINS OF THE WORLD, SO THAT WHAT WE PUT OUT DID NOT COME BACK TO US, AND THAT OUR SINFUL NATURE DOES NOT REAP THE OBVIOUS DEATH. IT'S NOT OUR GOOD WORKS THAT GET US THROUGH THE GATES OF HEAVEN.”*

ASSAYAS PRESSES BONO ON THIS – *“THAT'S A GREAT IDEA, NO DENYING IT. SUCH GREAT HOPE IS WONDERFUL, EVEN THOUGH IT'S CLOSE TO LUNACY, IN MY VIEW. CHRIST HAS HIS RANK AMONG THE WORLD'S GREAT THINKERS. BUT 'SON OF GOD?' ISN'T THAT FAR-FETCHED?”*

BONO, SHOWING THAT HE'S READ A LOT OF C.S. LEWIS, SAYS – *“LOOK, THE SECULAR RESPONSE TO THE CHRIST STORY ALWAYS GOES LIKE THIS: HE WAS A GREAT PROPHET, OBVIOUSLY A VERY INTERESTING GUY, HAD A LOT TO SAY ALONG THE LINES OF OTHER*

GREAT PROPHETS, BE THEY ELIJAH, MUHAMMAD, BUDDHA, OR CONFUCIUS.

BUT ACTUALLY, CHRIST DOESN'T ALLOW YOU THAT.

HE DOESN'T LET YOU OFF THAT HOOK.

CHRIST SAYS, 'NO. I'M NOT SAYING I'M A TEACHER – DON'T CALL ME TEACHER. I'M NOT SAYING I'M A PROPHET. I'M SAYING 'I'M THE MESSIAH.' I'M SAYING, 'I AM GOD INCARNATE.'

SO WHAT YOU'RE LEFT WITH IS EITHER CHRIST WAS WHO HE SAID HE WAS – THE MESSIAH – OR A COMPLETE NUTCASE.

THE IDEA THAT THE ENTIRE COURSE OF CIVILIZATION FOR OVER HALF OF THE GLOBE COULD HAVE ITS FATE CHANGED & TURNED UPSIDE DOWN BY A NUTCASE – FOR ME, THAT'S FAR-FETCHED!"

BO NO, THE EDGE & LARRY MULLEN ARE NOT AT ALL SHY ABOUT PROCLAIMING THEIR FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST & THE WAY IN WHICH EVERYTHING THEY DO IN LIFE IS CENTERED AROUND THAT COMMITMENT.

THERE SEEMS TO BE A CLEAR CONNECTION BETWEEN THE FAITH OF U2 & OUR FOCUS LAST SUNDAY – STEVIE WONDER.

WE TALKED ABOUT STEVIE BEING AN EVANGELICAL FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE.

THAT MAY BE EVEN MORE TRUE FOR THE MEMBERS OF U2.

THEY HAVE A PASSION FOR JESUS CHRIST THAT IS MATCHED BY THEIR PASSION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE.

I THINK THEY WOULD SAY THAT THEIR PASSION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IS A NATURAL OUTGROWTH OF THEIR PASSION FOR JESUS CHRIST.

TO THEM, IT WOULD BE INCONCEIVABLE TO HAVE A PASSION FOR JESUS CHRIST WITHOUT LIVING OUT THAT PASSION IN A PURSUIT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE.

NAME A CAUSE & U2 HAS BEEN INVOLVED.

CITE A NEED AND THEY'VE RESPONDED.

POINT TO A COUNTRY & THEY'VE BEEN THERE.

BONO HAS MET WITH PRESIDENTS, PRIME MINISTERS & POPES IN SERVING AS THE VOICE OF THOSE WHOSE VOICE IS SO OFTEN UNHEARD & WHOSE NEEDS ARE SO OFTEN UNMET.

OF ALL THE U2 SONGS THAT SPEAK TO THE SOUL, THE ONE WE'VE CHOSEN MIGHT SEEM HIGHLY UNLIKELY.

THE MERE TITLE RAISES EYEBROWS.

FOR SOME, IT SEEMS TO BE CLEAR EVIDENCE THAT U2 IS NOT A CHRISTIAN BAND.

THE ARGUMENT GOES LIKE THIS – *“IF THEY STILL HAVEN'T FOUND WHAT THEY'RE LOOKING FOR, THEN THEY MUST NOT HAVE FOUND CHRIST. THEY MUST STILL BE LOST IN SPIRITUAL CONFUSION BECAUSE IF SOMEONE HAS MET & ACCEPTED CHRIST, THEY WOULD NEVER SAY, 'I STILL HAVEN'T FOUND WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR.'”*

I THINK THAT'S THE MARVEL OF U2'S MUSIC.

THEY DON'T SING SIMPLE, MEANINGLESS PLATITUDES.

THEIR SONGS ARE REAL & HONEST & CHALLENGING.

WHEN I HEAR THIS SONG, I HEAR THE WORDS OF THE APOSTLE PAUL THAT WE'VE READ THIS MORNING FROM HIS LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS.

PAUL IS IN PRISON WHEN HE'S WRITING.

HIS MOVEMENTS ARE SEVERELY LIMITED & YET HE USES ATHLETIC ENDEAVORS AS ANALOGIES – THE RACE OF A RUNNER OR A CHARIOTEER.

PAUL MAKES IT CLEAR THAT HE HASN'T FINISHED THE RACE – HE HASN'T REACHED THE GOAL.

HE SAYS – “*NOT THAT I HAVE ALREADY OBTAINED THIS OR HAVE ALREADY REACHED THE GOAL; BUT I PRESS ON TO MAKE IT MY OWN.*”

I THINK THAT'S PART OF THE MESSAGE THAT U2 CONVEYS IN THEIR SONG, “*I STILL HAVEN'T FOUND WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR.*”

THEY'RE SAYING THERE'S MUCH MORE AHEAD OF THEM THAT CHRIST IS CALLING THEM TO DO.

I THINK BOTH PAUL'S WORDS AND THOSE OF U2 SHOULD BE CHALLENGING TO ALL OF US.

FOR THOSE WHO FEEL AS THOUGH THEY'VE “ARRIVED” IN THEIR FAITH, THESE WORDS CALL FOR A REASSESSMENT OF THAT CONCLUSION.

WHAT YOU'VE GOT IN THIS PASSAGE IS A MAN WHO HAS GONE THROUGH EVERY IMAGINABLE CHALLENGE, A MAN WHO HAS LIVED HIS LIFE FOR THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL, A MAN WHO – IN HIS LETTERS TO VARIOUS CHURCHES - HAS WRITTEN THE GREATEST THEOLOGICAL WORKS EVER COMPOSED.

IF THIS MAN IS SAYING HE HASN'T ARRIVED IN HIS FAITH – IF HE'S SAYING THERE'S MORE FOR HIM TO DO – IF HE'S SAYING HE'S NOT YET SATISFIED & HASN'T YET ATTAINED ALL THAT GOD INTENDS FOR HIM - WOULD IT NOT BE THE EPITOME OF ARROGANCE FOR *ME* TO SUGGEST THAT *I HAVE*?!

PAUL SAYS, “*I PRESS ON TOWARD THE GOAL FOR THE PRIZE OF THE HEAVENLY CALL OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS.*”

I THINK U2 WAS LOOKING AT PAUL IN WRITING “*I STILL HAVEN’T FOUND WHAT I’M LOOKING FOR.*”

THIS IS NOT A STATEMENT OF DOUBT BUT, RATHER, THE QUINTESSENTIAL ACCOUNT OF FAITH.

WITHIN THE LYRICS OF THE SONG, THERE IS A STRAIGHTFORWARD STATEMENT OF ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN FAITH & THE BOLD PROCLAMATION THAT “*YOU KNOW I BELIEVE IT.*”

IRONICALLY, IT IS *BECAUSE OF* AND NOT *IN SPITE OF* THAT FAITH THAT THEY FEEL COMPELLED TO SAY “*I STILL HAVEN’T FOUND WHAT I’M LOOKING FOR.*”

THEY LOOK AROUND THE WORLD & THEIR FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST AND EVERYTHING HE TAUGHT & EVERYTHING HE STOOD FOR & EVERYTHING HE DIED FOR CAUSES THEM TO PRESS ON – LOOKING & WORKING FOR THE WORLD CHRIST PROCLAIMED.

THERE ARE SOME WHO FEEL THEY’VE ARRIVED & CAN QUIT SEARCHING, QUIT WORKING, QUIT STRIVING.

PAUL TALKS A LOT ABOUT THOSE FOLKS IN HIS LETTERS. HE SAYS HE’S NOT ONE OF THEM.

U2 WOULD AGREE WITH PAUL & SAY THEY HAVEN’T ARRIVED BECAUSE THEY DON’T THINK THEIR WORK IS COMPLETED.

MAKE NO MISTAKE – BOTH PAUL AND U2 ARRIVED AT A PLACE WHERE THEY’D *FOUND* CHRIST – OR, MORE ACCURATELY, CHRIST HAD FOUND *THEM*.

I THINK WHAT U2 IS SAYING IS, “*IF YOU’VE COME TO A PLACE WHERE YOU’RE SATISFIED, THEN MORE POWER TO YOU.*

BUT WE’RE NOT.

WE’RE STILL LOOKING.

WE'RE LOOKING TO HELP CREATE A WORLD WHERE PEOPLE AREN'T LEFT OUT & LEFT BEHIND – A WORLD WHERE LOVE IS STRONGER THAN HATE, A WORLD WHERE PEOPLE TRY TO UNDERSTAND & ACCEPT SOMEONE WHO'S DIFFERENT RATHER THAN FEARING & REJECTING THEM.

WE'RE LOOKING TO HELP CREATE A WORLD WHERE PEOPLE ARE MORE CONCERNED WITH WHAT THEY CAN GIVE THAN WHAT THEY CAN GET – A WORLD WHERE COMPASSION IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN COMPETITION.”

I THINK THE APOSTLE PAUL, FROM HIS PRISON CELL, WOULD BE CHEERING THEM ON IN THEIR EFFORTS.

IMAGINE HIM SWAYING HIS CHAINS, A SMILE ON HIS FACE, AS WE JOIN THE GREAT APOSTLE IN LISTENING TO AS BOLD & CHALLENGING A STATEMENT OF FAITH AS YOU'LL EVER HEAR. (PLAY SONG – “I STILL HAVEN'T FOUND WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR”)

U2 IS IN THE MIDST OF A 30TH ANNIVERSARY TOUR OF THEIR ALBUM “THE JOSHUA TREE” – THE ALBUM THAT CONTAINS THAT SONG WE JUST HEARD.

ON THAT TOUR, 40-50-60 THOUSAND PEOPLE ARE SINGING ALONG WITH THEIR LYRICS – LYRICS OF SOME OF THEIR OTHER SONGS, THE VERY TITLES OF WHICH, TELL YOU OF THEIR MESSAGE – SONGS LIKE “ONE,” “BEAUTIFUL DAY,” “GRACE,” “PEACE ON EARTH,” AND “YAHWEH.”

THEY INCLUDE TITLES LIKE “40” – THE EXACT WORDS OF THE 40TH PSALM SET TO MUSIC.

THAT ONE IS OFTEN THE LAST SONG THEY SING & CONCERTGOERS LEAVE AN ARENA SINGING IT – THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE SINGING WORDS OF THE BIBLE TOGETHER.

BONO ONCE SAID, IN A REFERENCE TO THE ANCIENT PRACTICE OF DRAWING A FISH IN THE SAND TO INDICATE ONE’S CHRISTIAN FAITH – “MAYBE WE JUST HAVE TO SORT OF DRAW OUR FISH IN THE SAND. IT’S THERE FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE INTERESTED.”

PERHAPS WE’RE ALL CALLED TO DRAW OUR OWN “FISH IN THE SAND” – SOMETHING IN OUR OWN LIVES THAT WILL LET OTHERS KNOW WHERE OUR DEEPEST COMMITMENT IN LIFE LIES. AMEN.

*The Reverend Dr. Dennis R. Davenport
Eastminster Presbyterian Church
Evansville, Indiana*