

Music Blurbs for 03-10-2019

News and Notes

This week we welcome guest violinist Semyon Ziskind who will perform music from Bach's G Minor Solo Violin Sonata, "Meditation" from *Thais* by Massenet, as well as accompany the choir anthem "By Gracious Powers," set to a moving text by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Hymns will include "A mighty fortress" and "On eagle's wings."

8:00 a.m. Bulletin

"A mighty fortress is our God" is usually viewed as a battle cry of the Reformation. The first printed appearance of the text is from Augsburg 1529 and is titled "A Hymn of Comfort." The idea of battle cry comes from the 19th century and was reinforced by such composers in such works as Mendelssohn's "Reformation" Symphony and Meyerbeer's opera *The Huguenots*. As stated in the companion to our hymnal, "this...interpretation is out of character with Luther's understanding of his own hymn. He saw it as the grounds on which Christians can take hope in times of trial and conflict..."

Today's prelude is by Dietrich Buxtehude (1637-1707). It is a chorale prelude on "A mighty fortress." Chorale preludes were used to introduce and convey the mood of the hymn about to be sung. Here, the composer uses the technique called "ornamented chorale" in which the tune is decorated often beyond recognition. The tune was well known. More importantly, ornamented chorale is used to denote deep feeling and contemplation and gives us a glimpse to an understanding of the text closer to Luther's. Jumping ahead a few centuries, the postlude is the introduction of Jan Zwart's (1877-1937) Chorale Fantasy on "A Mighty Fortress." The Dutch composer was part of a general movement among church musicians to return to a golden era of church music, which for Lutherans meant the 18th century. He uses the forms and techniques of his baroque north German forbears, but the understanding of the hymn has been transformed by the 19th century composers of intervening years.

10:30 Bulletin

Today's choir anthem was composed by Russell Schulz-Widmar. For years, he was a Professor of Liturgical Music at the Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest as well as well as Director of Music in Austin area churches. He edited and co-edited many hymnals as well as being a member of the Standing Committee that compiled our own *Hymnal 82*.

The text is by Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was born in Breslau Germany in 1906. When he graduated with a Doctorate in Theology at the age of 24 from Berlin University, he was too young to be ordained. He came to the US and studied at Union Theological Seminary in NYC and became acquainted with Adam

Clayton Powell, Sr. at the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem and taught Sunday school there. He felt that from there he began to see things from the perspective of those that are oppressed.

He was ordained when he returned to Germany in 1931. In 1933 Hitler came to power and Bonhoeffer immediately spoke out against the idolatrous cult of the Fuehrer and against the Nazis' persecution of the Jews. In the summer of 1933 Hitler and the Nazis went about shaping church leadership more to their liking. By September, the church passed the Aryan paragraph, stating that anyone with any Jewish ancestry would be barred from serving as pastors. In response, noted theologian Karl Barth drafted the Barmen Resolution stating the Christ, not Hitler was the head of the church. Only twenty percent of the clergy signed on to this. Those that did started the "Confessing Church" an underground church which the Nazis tried to suppress.

With the underground church came an underground seminary in Finkenwalde. During this time Bonhoeffer wrote one of his most well-known works, *The Cost of Discipleship*, a call to a more radical obedience to Christ and a rebuke of comfortable Christianity. "Cheap grace is preaching forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession.... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate." The Gestapo eventually closed the seminary and arrested 27 pastors and students.

Bonhoeffer briefly came back to the US but knew he had to return to Germany. His pacifism had turned to ridding Germany of Hitler and the Nazis at any cost. Upon his return, in spite of being banned from writing, or preaching and being viewed as an enemy of the state, a relative convinced authorities that Bonhoeffer would be a useful asset in the Abwehr, military intelligence. He became a double agent, making contacts with the Allies for the resistance and helping Jews escape to Switzerland. In April 1943 he was arrested and sent to the military prison in Tegel to await trial.

In September of 1944, documents came to light to the authorities about the involvement of Abwehr members in the failed assassination plot against Hitler in July of that year. While not in on the plot, he might have known of it and knew some of the conspirators, so he was sent to the concentration camp, first at Buchenwald and then Flossenburg. He was executed by hanging on April 9, 1945, just two weeks before Allied troops freed the camp. "To endure the cross is not tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ."