

Announcements, Announcements, Announcements

Luke 1: 26-31; 24: 1-6a

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Union Church of Cupertino

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Announcements have been a problem for the church for more than 300 years. Ministers often resent them for they can detract from the solemnity of the hour. Heads of boards and committees love them... when else do you have this many people listening at the same time? Should announcements be allowed or should they be banned? Some say this and some say that and the question never seems to be settled.

In 1662 a rubric, or special instruction, was added to the Church of England's *Book of Common Prayer*.

Nothing shall be proclaimed or published in the Church during the time of Divine Service, but by the Minister, nor by him anything but what is prescribed in the Rules of this Book, or enjoined by the King....

It was a good try but nothing changed. In 1662 Church announcements served the purpose of a local newspaper: They revealed who was planning to get married; who had been excluded from receiving communion and - of more interest - why. Announcements were almost always made by the church clerk.

On Easter Day in the early 1800's, the clerk of a Shropshire parish announced:

Last Friday was Good Friday, but we forgot; so next Friday it will be. - P.H. Ditchfield, *The Parish Clerk*, pp. 170-171.

In 1850 at another church the clerk "tossed this notice over the pulpit:"

There will be no service next Sunday as the rector is going grouse shooting. (The rector had, in fact asked His clerk to tell the people that he would be away.)  
*Ibid.* pg. 171

But my favorite announcement story from the past occurred at Poughill Parish on the Cornish coast. Poughill was one of those villages that occasionally benefitted from a shipwreck along its shore. The suggestion has been made that some of those shipwrecks were caused by false lights set along the shore. Be that as it may, in the middle of a Sunday service the vicar of Poughill Parish was handed a note from his housekeeper. She was informing him that a trading vessel was at that very moment being driven upon the rocks. The vicar brought his sermon to an abrupt halt. He said it was time for announcements and began to walk down the aisle removing his surplice. The congregation assumed that he headed toward the baptismal font, located by the front door.

But at the door he shouted: "My Christian brethren, there's a ship wrecked in the cove. Let's all start fair!" And with that He flung aside his surplice and his robe and led the way to the spoils.  
- S. Baring Gould, *The Vicar of Morwenstow*, pg. 98.

Announcements can upset decorum. They have been a problem in the church for more than 300 years.

These days of course we have a monthly newsletter, and there's the weekly bulletin as well. But these often create their own problems. In my first month as minister of the First Congregational Church in San Jose one of our Sunday morning bulletin announcements was reprinted in the *Mercury News*.

If you enjoy singing and would like to share your talent you are invited to join the Chancel Choir. We rehearse on Thursday evening at 7 PM, & child care is provided. What a wonderful way to serve your church. - August 15, 1978.

I receive at least one email each week containing church bulletin bloopers

Remember in your prayers today those who are sick of the church.

The head of the stewardship committee has announced that he is planning to "up" his pledge for next year. He challenges us all: "Up yours!"

Announcements continue to be a problem. They detract from the solemnity of the service. They have a way of conveying things we do not mean.

Having said all this, how curious of God to choose announcement as the way of sharing most of the important stuff with us.

Already this morning we have heard two of God's prime announcements:

Fear not! The Lord is with you! - Luke 1:30

Christ is risen! He is not here. - Luke 24:5

God has stuff to be announced every Sunday morning. Blessed are those who have the ears to hear.

Some 38 years ago a social worker from the Elizabeth Lund Home for Unwed Mothers visited the parsonage in East Saint Johnsbury, Vermont. She was doing a home site inspection. At the

end of her visit she said we had been approved as potential adopting parents. Sometime in the next few months she would be giving us a call. How do you measure the immediacy of such an announcement? “Sometime in the next few months?” Joanne and I drove to Saint Johnsbury that night and bought two diapers and a “onesy,” the modest beginnings of a layette. The next day, the very next day, the social worker called and said, “Come today and pick up your new baby!”

Unto us a child was born.... unto us a daughter given.

It was then that I learned that there’s a world of difference between announcements. There’s the two diaper announcement that conveys information but doesn’t stir the soul, and then there’s the whole layette announcement that turns our world upside down. Too often the announcements that we share in church are the 2 diaper kind and we have not the ears to hear the whole layette.

After driving all the way across Vermont to Burlington and then back home with baby Susan, Joanne and I had a few announcements to make:

“Hi, Dad, this is Art. Congratulations! You’re a grandparent! Joanne and I have a baby daughter. Her name is Susan!” The silence at the other end of the phone was absolute. My parents lived many miles away but hadn’t imagined they were that much out of the loop. We hadn’t told anyone about our hope to adopt. When my father was finally able to speak he said: “I didn’t know you were pregnant.” I assured him I had not been. Then we began to get the story straight.

Two diaper announcements can seem a trifling nuisance but please know there’s joy in the complete layette.

The Rev. John McNeill was once preaching to a fashionable congregation in the West End of London. He was struck by the polite apathy in their faces. At last he stopped his sermon and shouted,

“If ye really believed the things I’m telling you, you’d jump right over that pew and shake hands with the man next ye and congratulate each other. But no, ye sit there like a lot of dull tailor’s ‘dummies.’” - Alexander Gammie, *Rev. John McNeill: His Life and Work*, pp. 267-268.

Another minister, the Rev. Robert Stephen Hawker, at Morwenstowe, Cornwall, had the boards removed from the front of the high pulpit. When asked for a reason he said: “people need to see the preacher’s feet.” That didn’t help many of his parishioners but those who were Biblically literate remembered Isaiah 52: 7:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings....

There are whole-layette announcements that belong in church every week and we would be

remiss if we were to give over all the time to the two diaper kind. Let me share two of God's best:

God says: I want to be in a loving relationship with you. I have set down the basics of this relationship on tablets of stone.... but since that did not cement our relationship I sent some servants (you have called them prophets) to remind us - you and me - of the possibilities of a loving relationship. But since that did not particularly work, I have sent my son, to show what love can mean... Believe me I will not quit. I want us in a loving relationship.

The second is an announcement about persistence:

I want to be in a loving relationship with you and there is nothing.... not the defenses you throw up... not the sin in which you acquiesce, not the past, not the present, nothing that will ever prevent our love from coming to bloom.

That's the whole layette. Those who have ears to hear shall lack nothing. God's announcements belong in the church.