

Hammers, Hearts, and Hands

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A few days ago, I stopped at the mission's Gibsonia campus to check on a few things, and was delighted to arrive just as Amy and Emily were unloading the kiln from the previous day's firing. They took a moment to show me the beautiful results, and I was thrilled to see the finished work of a dozen participants, most of them novices, who recently attended the mission's four week clay construction class. Coffee mugs, trays, bowls, and other interesting and useful articles had been hand-crafted from clay, allowed to thoroughly dry, fired once, then glazed in a variety of colors and styles, and finally fired once again to melt the glaze onto the surface as a permanent glass coating. I was really impressed with the designs, the workmanship, and the final results. I hope you can become involved in one or more of the many programs offered there in the months to come, each of which is intended to further develop your God-given creative instincts in a setting that is focused on the One from Whom all blessings flow.

As I handled and observed these newly-fired ceramic creations, I thought about what they once were. Clay is a truly amazing substance. It comes from the earth. It can be wedged, formed, rolled into a coil or a slab, or thrown on a wheel. It can be shaped, while soft, into a countless number of shapes, forms and structures. When the shaping process is over, the item is left to dry thoroughly, until void of moisture content. At this stage, the item is called Greenware, and although it is hard and breakable, it can actually be reconstituted into pliable clay once again if exposed to enough water.

Once the first firing takes place, however, the Greenware is converted into Bisqueware. This is a physical transformation that turns the Greenware into a hard, brittle, glasslike substance that is no longer capable of absorbing water anymore. The firing process changes the clay into something it never was before, rendering impossible any chance of returning to what it once was. You can take a piece of the Bisqueware and grind it into a fine powder and mix it with water, but even in this state, it will never return to clay. This thermal process, known as vitrification, changes the clay forever.

A few hours ago, I had the privilege of listening to a newly posted podcast of a sermon preached by the Rev. Dr. Richard A. Morledge, then pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Bakerstown, on Palm Sunday, April 8, 1990. This sermon and nearly 30 years' worth of others

are being made available due to the graciousness of Dr. Morledge, the tedious efforts of our friend, Tom Shoup, who copied more than 1000 sermons from cassette tapes to a digital system, and the labors of Amanda Becker and Julie Wettach, both mission workers at Hosanna Industries, who are methodically uploading those sermons onto a newly established "It's a Great Day in the Kingdom" podcast site which is linked to Hosanna's website. We hope that these proclamations will be helpful to you in your own journey of faith, and I encourage you to frequently listen to these sermons as preached by a man whom I consider to be one of the greatest communicators of the Gospel in our lifetimes.

In the particular sermon which I listened to, Dr. Morledge described those whom he referred to as "Hosanna people", those who are in desperate need, people who are crying out for God's help. He taught that the word "Hosanna", heard by Jesus on the first Palm Sunday 2000 years ago, was not really a word of praise as is commonly thought, but was instead a prayer. Its true meaning is, "Save us now." Jesus answered that prayer in seven days. Later He sent His Spirit on the first Pentecost to equip the newly born Church to be His body in the world, continuing His great work of salvation.

Then Dr. Morledge went on to describe to the congregation of that great Church that a new mission was to be launched that day. Its name would be Hosanna Industries.

Following the sermon, additional words were spoken, announcing what this new mission was intended to do: "Whenever - wherever we hear as Christians the Hosanna cries of God's needy children, our faith demands that we do something, representing a powerful Savior instead of an impotent theological idea. We cannot anymore bear the shamefulness of poverty that is unaddressed, nor can we bear mission mediocrity... this Church today in establishing Hosanna Industries is proclaiming loud and clear that ultimately some day the love of God in Christ will heal all the world's ills."

The mission was born as an outward expression of the Kingdom of God. It was born to proclaim the Good News by way of home construction, repair and rehabilitation for the poor; vocational training of the unskilled; small business development for would-be entrepreneurs; job creation for new and future mission workers; and volunteer mobilization, locally and beyond, to locations of impoverishment and calamity.

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The Real Worth

By fax: From the bottom of my heart, I thank you! You have no idea what this means to me. I sleep peacefully now, no longer cold and frightened of the situation I was in before this beautiful furnace. Worrying about this cancer and not missing work was enough of a strain. I never asked anyone for anything before. I never had anyone who could help me with something as big as this. I believe the stress that is gone helps me cope better with cancer. People see a difference in me. I feel a little more lighthearted. You did all of this, and I will never be able to thank you enough! Love, Dolly

By mail: Thank you so much for blessing me with your skills and hard work. I also really enjoyed your company. I have a happy heart today because of your kindness and to know that good does exist in this sometimes dark world. God bless you and I will keep you in my prayers. Love, Lisa

By email: Today, as we began worship at Ozaukee Congregational, I actually played your voicemail from my phone into the microphone. The congregation was very moved by your kind words, and the members send their prayers and best wishes to you for a very blessed remainder of your Advent/Christmas season and a bright beginning to the new year. We're gathering commitments from youth and adults for our return to Hosanna. We aim to have an eager and enthusiastic team again this coming year. In the meantime, your ongoing work is an inspiration—and the stories told through your "e-blasts" are truly heartwarming. We thank God for you and your incredible resolve, working to reflect God's compassion to those the world may regard as the least, the last, and the lost. Grace and peace, Rob

I can't thank you all enough for the wonderful work you did on my house. No more tripping or dipping on my rugs. I feel a lot safer. I am enjoying my new light bulbs and rug in my bathroom too. I was at peace sleeping with the new solid door AND knowing the pipe was replaced ...no leaks. You were all so nice and polite to me. You are A PLUS. God sent you to help me out. Keep up with all the wonderful things you repair to help. God Bless. You all are angels. ~Joy

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The first five young mission workers were called forward from the congregation. The first assistance project was to begin the very next day, less than a mile away from the church, at the home of an elderly woman and her disabled daughter. Their income was less than half of what the government defined as poverty level. A newly donated used pick-up truck was parked outside, donated by the late Frank Reese, president of North Pittsburgh Telephone Company, painted Hosanna green by Bart Williams, president and owner of Parks Moving and Storage and serviced by Tom Henry of Tom Henry Chevrolet.

Then, as this unique worship service drew near to its ending, Dr. Morledge asked the mission workers to kneel at the chancel, he asked the more than 500 people in attendance to rise, and he asked all to join hands.

At that moment, a Spirit of quiet holiness descended upon that assembly of believers. Some people shed tears. As I listened to the recording, I sensed a nearly palpable silence in that place 27 years ago. Then, with his voice momentarily breaking, Dr. Morledge offered the following prayer:

“Father, in faith we reach out to try to follow You, and like Abraham of old we’re not quite sure where we’re going but we go now to be your people in this community and clear to the uttermost parts of the world. Father, thank you for these individuals whom we set apart in Your name, please indue them with your Holy Spirit and empower them to be people who reach to the Hosanna people and in ministering may they be ministered unto, and as we join hands as a great church, Father, bind us in this time of faith, not with criticism but with our love, to try to grow and become even greater the people that you want us to be. We thank you for all of the blessings of the past and now we ask a special blessing. So please Father, to these six individuals, whom we now set apart and commission as mission workers of Hosanna Industries, thank you Father, thank you, please place Your Hands upon the heads of these particular missionaries. Thank you Father, we feel Your Presence, we go out in faith in Christ’s name, Amen.”

I knelt with those five young men that day, and remember the first sounds a new-born mission heard were those of the organ, beautifully phrasing, “Hosanna in the Highest!”

We were clay then. Soft, pliable, malleable. We were ready to be shaped by the Potter’s Hands.

I suppose the years have vitrified us through the hard and often difficult firing of work, striving, learning, succeeding, and sometimes failing. Whatever we may or may not be, I’m certain we could never go back to become what we once were. Though we’ve learned much, and tried hard to refine our efforts into a vessel of grace useful to the hands of God in this world, I still hope that something within the heart of Hosanna is yet soft and pliable, ready to be shaped at the Master’s bidding.

Over the years, Hosanna Industries has been privileged to help more than 3400 needy households. We’ve blitz built almost 200 new homes. We’ve received more than 160 mission workers, each one leaving a mark, some weaving at least a part of their hearts into the mission’s own heart. In the past 27 years, the mission has travelled about 2 1/2 million miles, moving more than 60,000 tons of material, working with about 150,000 volunteers, in spending less than 16 million dollars to get almost 60 million dollars worth of work done. We’ve had a presence in 35 states, provided disaster relief work in nearly a dozen locations, and given assistance to more than 40 charitable organizations who needed help. We’ve provided intensive trade-skill training for hundreds of people, and we’ve witnessed the creation of at least ten small entrepreneurial businesses that were an outgrowth of our influence. On occasion, the Lord has sent us abroad to five different countries, and we have hosted volunteers from a half-dozen nations and all 50 states in the United States of America.

Just a few days ago, I held a newly fired ceramic cup in my hands and admired its beauty. I can estimate the time when, not long ago, it was nothing but a lump of clay, but I could never know for how long it may be of future service to someone who finds it useful.

I believe God inspired the birth of Hosanna Industries. I’m grateful that His hands have molded and shaped this mission into the vessel of His choosing. I’m very grateful that the commissioning prayer of Dick Morledge 27 Palm Sundays ago has been answered innumerable times.

The cries of the Hosanna people have been heard, not ignored. I don’t know how long this vessel called Hosanna will be useful to God’s hands, but I’m so deeply grateful for your part in it, and for all who have gone before. Without you, and all the other wonderful, gracious, generous, believing people like you, I don’t think God could have ever shaped the mission His hands have made.

Happy 27th birthday, Hosanna! And thank you, dear Hosanna friend! ~DDE



Construction Update

The first quarter of 2017 has gone by so quickly! There are so many people crying out for help. We continue striving to become more effective and efficient in our work everyday so we can meet people at their point of need, show them the compassion of Christ, and offer them peace, hope, security, dignity, and joy. In the first three months of this year we have assisted 20 households in Southwestern Pennsylvania, have hosted nearly 100 volunteers, and have completed about a quarter million dollars of market valued work! These numbers are exciting and impressive but it is the people whose lives we touch that are most important. We couldn’t do this without you so let me share a little story with you. Becky called Diane to let her know we would be there the next day to replace her old windows with new energy-efficient ones and to provide her with a new stove. Upon arrival the next morning, all the window treatments were down and lunch was being prepared. - a wonderful, delicious lunch. Becky commented that Diane had worked harder than our staff and Diane replied, “Well isn’t that the way it is supposed to be?” In a world where much is expected Diane stands out like a beautiful rose in a field of tall grass. Thank you from all the people we serve.

West Virginia Flood Recovery

Last June Richwood, West Virginia was devastated by what is being called a thousand year flood. This year Hosanna Industries is making a difference, changing lives, rebuilding, and renovating for impoverished households in Richwood. We anticipate helping 45 households altogether, have finished three projects thus far and have a crew down in Richwood this week helping three more households. I spoke with Mary on Friday. She was getting emotional as we were wrapping up. She wanted to know if this was real because she doesn’t want to get her hopes up. Nothing good like this ever happens. I assured her this is real; we plan to help her. She smiled and her eyes teared up but she still said she was going to try not to get excited. I can’t wait until we can get to her house and show her that this is real. God cares about her and so do we.

News from Hosanna Gibsonia

There are so many great classes being offered at Hosanna Gibsonia. Whether you have experience or not, whether you are young or old, whether you are male or female - no matter who you are - we have a place for you. Ukrainian Egg Decorating, window mosaics, stained glass sun catchers, copper enamel jewelry making, Acorn Club (a summer program for children), and resin work are all coming up. If you haven’t taken a class, you need to. The environment is so peaceful, welcoming and relaxing even as you are being taught skills and practicing the creative gifts God has given you. A woman working with clay in our recent mug-making course exclaimed the other day that this is the happiest she had felt all week. Don’t delay. Check out our upcoming events calendar on our website at hosannaindustries.org/upcoming-events/ and sign up for a class or two. You will be blessed!

Special Events

We hold several benefit events throughout the year so there is something for everyone - a 5K, a tea, a trap shoot, a golf outing, and a festival of trees. This year our 2nd Annual Enchanted Garden Tea Party will be held on May 13 at Hosanna Gibsonia. Seats are limited so please register as soon as possible to be assured a spot. Our 13th Annual Trap Shoot will be held on June 3 at Northside Sportsmen’s Association in Warrendale and a new event, HI-School Dance will be held on July 14. For more information, or to register or sponsor any of these events, please visit our website at hosannaindustries.org/upcoming-events/. If you would like to be a part of our special events team that works to plan and prepare events, please contact Amanda Becker at 724-770-0262 or amanda@hosannaindustries.org.



New Mission Workers

In our last newsletter I wrote to you about our desire for new mission workers and interns. God hears and answers prayers. Doors opened so that Bill Kooser was able to work with Hosanna Industries for a couple of months at the beginning of this year. Additionally, God sent Cole Bowman, Sal Sunseri and Dan Utz to join with us as new mission workers, serving the Lord, answering cries for help, and meeting the needs of our impoverished brothers and sisters. We are grateful for their answer to Christ’s call, their eagerness to learn, and their tremendous hearts, not to mention their strong young arms and backs! Welcome to the Hosanna family!

New Tool Truck

About the same time we hired the new mission workers we realized we really needed a new tool truck. As our old tool truck was aging and as we were planning many trips to Richwood, WV this year we knew we needed to upgrade. On March 14 Todd Rossman, our Board President, and Brian Hetzer purchased a new tool truck. It has been fully outfitted and painted Hosanna Green. Yesterday it made its first trip to Richwood and today is serving our mission workers on its first jobsite. Thank you to all whose generosity made this purchase possible!

Palm Sunday Commissioning 2017

If you are interested in meeting our new mission workers, visiting our Hosanna Gibsonia campus, or seeing our new tool truck, please plan to come to our Palm Sunday Commissioning at 7PM in the gallery at 3930 Dickey Road, Gibsonia. There will be a brief commissioning service and light refreshments. We’d love to see you there.