Precious Memories:

A Rumanitive Retrospect on Pandemic, Consistency, and Time

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"As I travel on life's pathway,
Know not what the years may hold;
As I ponder, hope grows fonder,
Precious memories flood my soul."
- J.B.F. Wright

The last time I played the organ for a regular Sunday morning worship service...one with actual people in the pews and congregational singing...was over a year ago. The date was March 8, 2020, the day after my 35th birthday, and I was doing a short-term interim at the First Baptist Church of Savannah, GA, while my friend, Rev. James Richardson, recovered from a hip replacement surgery. Little did we know at the time how much life would change in the course of the coming year. And, little did I know that I would be called back a year later to officially join the First Baptist Church ministerial team. Life sure is interesting, isn't it?

When I returned to Savannah in the spring of this year to begin my new job as your Minister of Music, it was very easy for me to think that I had never been away and that time had not passed at all. Many things were exactly as I had left them the year before. For instance, my copies of the choir's 2020 Easter music were still lying on the piano in the choir room. The outline I had written for our final choir rehearsal was still on the dry-erase board.

There was even an empty coffee mug that Bill Gardner had forgotten on a table by the robe room door. I felt as though I had stepped into a time warp, and I found myself wishing that this horrible pandemic and the events of the past year were nothing more than a bad dream.

I have always been fascinated by our perceptions of memory, place, and time. I, like most of you, can close my eyes and vividly remember scenes from my childhood. As a result, it is as if things are frozen in time for me, forever remaining the way I remember them.

Bill Gardner's coffee mug left from the last Sunday rehearsal, March 8, 2020.

My paternal grandmother, for example, has been dead for 13 years, and our family sold her home shortly after her passing. But in my mind, she is still sitting at her kitchen table, waiting for me to drop by anytime. The same is true for the various churches I have served over the years. I can clearly remember where each one of my former choir members sat in their respective choir lofts. Even though I know many of them have moved on or passed away in the years since I left their churches, in my mind they are still there singing every Sunday together.

I would imagine that some of you think about First Baptist Church in a very similar way. But, it's important that we note the one major difference...our church is actually still here.

We may have been apart for more than a year, and we may have lost some things and some people that are very dear to us, but we know in our hearts that the church remains a constant in our lives. God's love shown to us in the faces of our fellow members, and the support that we receive in and through our community of faith, are assurances that should never be absent from our minds. As we come out of this season of pandemic, and as we process the trauma of the past year, let us cling to our precious memories, to our church family, and to our God.

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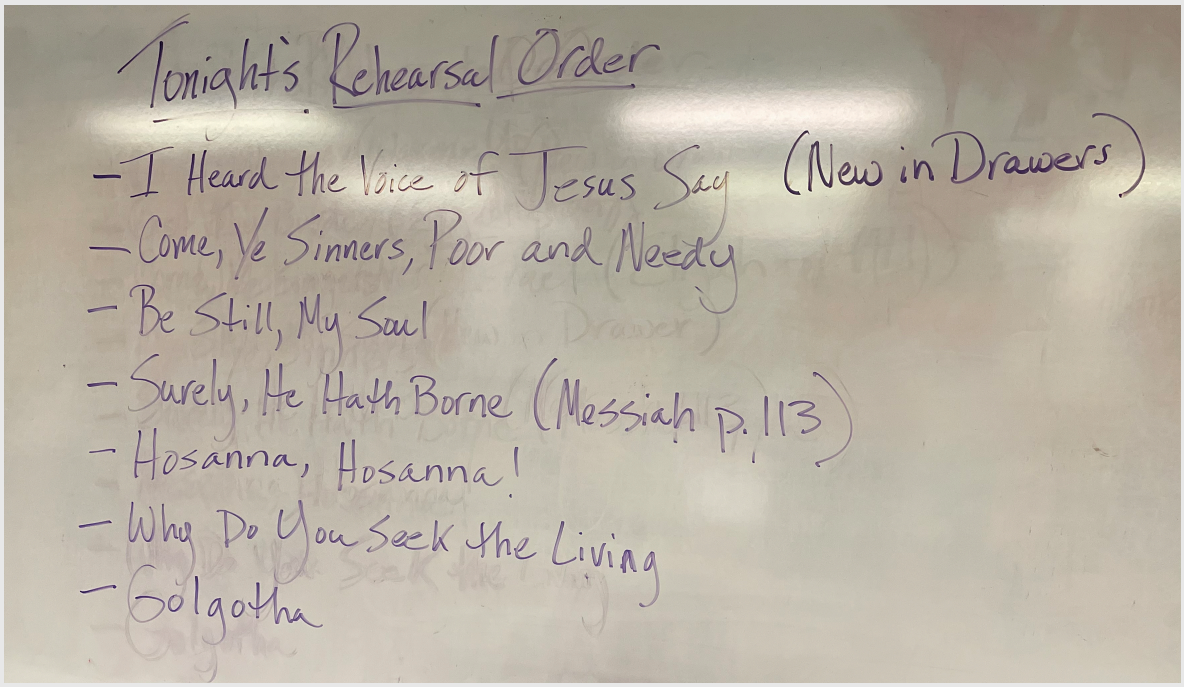

The rehearsal outline for March 11, 2020 is still adorning the choir room white board to this day. At the time, they were preparing for a haunting Maundy Thursday program, *Golgotha*.