

10-16-2005

The Things That Are God's

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Recommended Citation

Paul, John Steven, "The Things That Are God's" (2005). Soul Purpose Liturgical Drama. Paper 30. http://scholar.valpo.edu/soul_purpose/30

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The Things That Are God's
A play for actors and singers by John Steven Paul
Developed in workshop by Soul Purpose,
The Liturgical Drama Troupe of the Valparaiso University Theatre
A liturgical drama for the 22nd Sunday after Pentecost
October 16, 2005

Characters:

ONE (Dan)
TWO (Amelia)
THREE (Joe)
FOUR (Mark)
FIVE (Molly)
SIX (Margaret)
SEVEN (Sylvia)

Words from the Book of Exodus, chapter 33:

Moses said, "Show me your glory, I pray." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, 'The Lord'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live."

Words from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, chapter 1:

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ [...] For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

Words from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 22:

"Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God

the things that are God's." When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

The Things That Are God's is a response in dramatic form to the Common Lectionary texts for the 22nd Sunday after Pentecost in Year A – the Year of Matthew. The play is not meant to be vague or unspecific, but capacious, inviting actors to round out the characters and the audience (or congregation) to find a place for itself in one or more layers of the story. The characters can be played, with minor adjustments, by men or women. – JSP

Prologue

ONE:

(inspecting two coins) The next question is obvious.

TWO:

Obviously.

THREE:

Then why don't they ask it?

FOUR:

Because they're amazed.

ONE:

No, because it's so... obvious. They didn't even have to ask.

FIVE:

Not to me. It's not obvious to me.

THREE:

Me either. What are...

TWO:

What?

SEVEN:

The things that are God's?

ONE:

Well, things like... uhm... well, like –

FOUR:

I'm telling you they didn't ask the question because the people, you know, the Pharisees and Herodians and those people were just *amazed*. They thought sure they had him and then he flashes this answer at them like Solomon.

SIX:

Or Harry Houdini.

FIVE:

Jesus, the escape artist. Huh.

FOUR:

Yeah, and they're so amazed they can't even look at him.

I.

DAN (ONE) and AMELIA (TWO) are at the far end of the staging area. DAN may look at AMELIA and vice versa, but they never look at each other unless the stage directions indicate it.

DAN is absent-mindedly clinking two coins together.

TWO:

What are you doing with those, those... what are they?

ONE:

Their hers.

TWO:

Her what?

ONE:

Her coins. She forgot them. You know? (*DAN looks at AMELIA*) You can't even look at me?

TWO:

She forgot them?

ONE:

You *won't* even look at me.

TWO:

Again?

ONE:

Will you. Will you? Please?

TWO turns and looks at ONE.

ONE:

(as if stung, turning away) Thank you.

TWO turns and looks away.

ONE:

Look at me.

TWO:

I can't. I can't let you see me. I can't let you look at my face.

ONE:

Why?

TWO:

Because... I hate you.

ONE:

No. You love me. You told me you did.

TWO:

You're right. I hate *myself* for loving *you*. And, believing you. And thinking you had... stopped doing... *THAT*. ... stopped worshipping *THAT*. Sometimes I don't even know who you are.

ONE:

I'm... *trying*. You know that, don't you? I'm trying and I was doing so well. I thought I'd turned a corner. Left it behind. Then I – well, you know, I got lost. I've been wanting to talk to you about it.

TWO:

Talking about it doesn't get us anywhere. You can't just talk. You have to walk. Don't talk. Walk.

ONE:

You make it sound easy. "Walk, don't talk." I thought I'd turned it around.

TWO:

Try again. Turn again.

ONE:

So, if I stop doing that, things will be fine? Right? (*Waits for an answer. No answer.*) ... if I stop doing that?

TWO:

It would be a start.

ONE:

A start?

TWO:

Yes, turning toward me and away from that would be a start.

ONE:

Then what? What's next?

TWO:

Serving. And, waiting.

ONE:

Serving? And, waiting?

TWO:

Start with the turning. Turning away from that.

ONE:

Show me the way to turn.

TWO:

I can't do that. You have to find the way.

ONE:

(pause; paralyzed) Obviously, I can't do that.

TWO:

You have to.

From another part of the stage:

FOUR:

You have to help me.

ONE:

Not by myself.

THREE:

No, not by yourself. We'd be doing it together. You'd just be leading.

TWO:

You're not by yourself. I'm here.

ONE:

Now.

FOUR:

People always say that to me. You won't be by yourself. But –

TWO:

I'll always be here. Believe me.

ONE:

I believe you, but –

THREE:

But, what?

ONE:

Can't you show me your face?

TWO:

But you cannot see my face.

FOUR:

People always say that to me, "You won't be by yourself," then, one day, I notice I'm all alone.

II.

JOE (FOUR) and MARK (THREE) are talking in another part of the stage. MOLLY (FIVE) enters to them.

THREE:

I'll be there with you, in spirit. I may just not be there – physically. I'll be waiting for you back here. And I'll give money. Lots of money.

FOUR:

Good. That's good.

Enter FIVE.

THREE:

Where have you been?

FOUR:

Haven't seen your face for days.

FIVE:

Class.

THREE:

Good?

FIVE:

Good. Yeah.

THREE:

Which class?

FIVE:

Service Learning.

FOUR:

Ah. Long class?

FIVE:

Two hours. Why?

FOUR:

Because we haven't seen you.

THREE:

... since Tuesday!

FIVE:

Right. Well, I've been busy.

FOUR:

With class.

FIVE:

Yeah.

FOUR:

Service.

THREE:

Learning.

FIVE:

Uhm... yeah. You know Service Learning isn't just serving, you know. It's learning too.

FOUR:

Yeah? Well, that's good. I guess.

FIVE:

I mean it's theoretical. There's a theory of service learning. In fact, it's the theory part that really... I mean, I really like the theory part. Learning. The theory. Theories, that is.

THREE:

I'm not surprised to hear that.

FIVE:

You're not?

THREE:

No. Because –

FOUR:

We're not surprised to hear that because when it comes to *practice* you're lots more interested in...

THREE:

... *Theory*.

FIVE:

You're trying to make a point.

FOUR:

How'd you know?

FIVE:

I can see by the look on your face. What is it?

THREE:

It's Thursday.

FOUR:

Yesterday was Wednesday.

THREE:

On Wednesdays we go to the –

FIVE:

Shelter! On Wednesdays we go to the shelter and I wasn't *here* to go with you.

FOUR:

No.

THREE:

You weren't.

FIVE:

I was in Chicago. I was on that field trip. I completely for-

FOUR:

It doesn't matter. I went. It was fine. It wasn't busy.

THREE:

I wasn't here either.

FIVE:

Where were you?

THREE:

I was waiting. For a bus. It's a long story.

FIVE:

So, you went by yourself? (*FOUR nods.*) I don't know what to say.

THREE:

I want to say... Thank God, for you, Mark.

FOUR:

What?

THREE:

(*goes to FOUR and embraces him*) Thank God for you. Because you really do it. You really serve. You don't just talk about it. You serve when we're here. You serve when we're not here. Sometimes we're not here for good reasons.

FIVE:

My reasons are... usually... Thank God for you, Mark!

FOUR:

You're embarrassing me.

THREE:

Sorry. But sometimes you have to say a thing to a person's face. Thank God for you, Mark. And, if you do go, you know we'll be praying for you.

From another part of the stage:

SIX:

I can't wait here much longer.

FIVE:

Go? Where?

FOUR:

You're going too, aren't you?

SIX:

I've been waiting for... centuries.

THREE:

I may go. I have to check some things. But you know I'd be supporting you from here.

SEVEN:

(enters and sits next to SIX) Whatcha doin' here?

FIVE:

Where are you going?

THREE:

Mark's going down there to help.

SEVEN:

(standing next to SIX on the bench now) Lady? Whatcha doin' here?

FIVE:

Down there? What about school? What about classes?

FOUR:

I thought you said you were going too. I don't think I can go by myself.

SEVEN:

Can I sit by you?

THREE:

We can be helping from up here. Right, Molly? *(FIVE looks at THREE and FOUR, perplexed)*

SEVEN:

Why ya got that look on your face? Are you worried?

FIVE:

Absolutely. There's lots that we can be doing here.

SEVEN:

Want some of this? *(Gives bird seed to SIX)*

SIX:

(Finally taking notice.) Thanks. *(Feeds geese.)*

THREE:

And we'll give lots of money. Right, Molly?

III.

MARGARET (SIX) and SYLVIA (SEVEN) sit on a park bench feeding geese and talking. MARGARET fights anxiety.

SEVEN:

Whatcha doin' here?

SIX:

Waiting.

SEVEN:

For what? The bus? *(no answer)* I wait for the bus every day. Not here. By my house. Over there on the other side.

SIX:

Do you mind it? Waiting?

SEVEN:

Not now. I used to hate it.

SIX:

But you don't hate it now?

SEVEN:

No.

SIX:

Why not?

SEVEN:

'Cuz now, I wait with my body. *(gives more seed)*

SIX:

How do you do that?

SEVEN:

Well... when I get to the bench, I first sweep it off with my arm like this. Keeps my pants clean. Then, I sit down a little at a time, like on one board at a time. No, I forgot, I put my book bag on this side and my lunchbox on this side; that way I got everything I need. Then, I sit down.

SIX:

One board at a time.

SEVEN:

Next I get the bird seeds out of my book bag.

SIX:

Do you ever forget things?

SEVEN:

Not important things. Well, not usually at least. But sometimes. If I forget bird seeds, I can buy 'em in that machine over there. For twenty five cents.

SIX:

Oh. But what if –

SEVEN:

What if I forgot something at home?

SIX:

Yes.

SEVEN:

My dad brings it if I really need it.

SIX:

Is that it then? Is that how you wait with your body?

SEVEN:

Wait, there's more. On the other side is my lunchbox.

SIX:

What do you do with that? You don't sneak anything, do you?

SEVEN:

Mostly not. But I think about what's in there.

SIX:

You said you wait with your body. Thinking's in your head.

SEVEN:

I don't think with my head. I think with my tongue. And with my nose.

SIX:

That kind of waiting would make me hungry.

SEVEN:

Yeah, I know. But mostly during all that waiting, I'm thinking of how good lunch is going to be.

SIX:

(becoming anxious again) ... still waiting. Still waiting.

SEVEN:

So then, I'm done touching, and tasting, and smelling, and I start counting.

SIX:

Counting?

SEVEN:

One thousand one, one thousand two.

SIX:

I'd be up to nine hundred ninety nine thousand nine hundred ninety and still –

SEVEN:

No, it never gets that high.

SIX:

Why not?

SEVEN:

The bus comes. Besides, about every one thousand one hundred, I sing a song.

SIX:

What song?

SEVEN:

(sings) If you keep your faith in me
I'll never leave your side
Keep turning toward my face
I'll forever be your guide.

SIX:

Wonderful! Sing it again.

SEVEN:

I do motions too.

If you keep your faith in me
I'll never leave your side
Keep turning toward my face *(she turns around as she sings)*
I'll forever be your guide.

From off:

ONE:

Sylvia?

SEVEN:

That's my dad.

SIX:

You do it every day? Wait with your body?

ONE:

Sylvia? Where are you?

SEVEN:

Almost. I've got to go. (*starts to go, then turns back*) What are you waiting for?

SIX:

Is that your name? Sylvia?

SEVEN:

Yeah, like silver.

ONE:

Sylvia. Time for supper.

SEVEN:

It's time for supper. (*starts to go, then turns back*) How much longer do you have to wait?

ONE:

Sylvia, come on. It's getting dark.

SIX:

Not much longer, I hope. I so hope.

ONE:

Sylvia. Where are you? Let me see your face.

SEVEN:

What are you waiting for?

Enter ONE.

SIX:

I'm not so sure that's the right question.

SEVEN:

Well, what's the right question?

SIX:

The right question. The right question is not what am I waiting for, it's who am I waiting for.

SEVEN:

I know exactly what you mean.

ONE:

(entering) Sylvia.

SEVEN:

Hi, Dad. *(to SIX)* I hope your who comes soon.

SIX:

I think she did.

ONE:

Who's your friend?

SEVEN:

Hey, what's your name?

SIX:

Margaret.

ONE:

Hello. Sylvia, we have to go. I made lasagna. (*Pause.*) And guess what? Your Mom's home.

SEVEN:

She is?

ONE:

She is.

SEVEN:

(*to SIX*) That's our *who*. That's who we've been waiting for. Right, Dad?

ONE:

For whom we've been waiting. Let's go.

SIX:

Better go with your dad before the lasagna gets cold.

SEVEN:

That's okay. I like Dad's lasagna, even cold. That's how I'll have it for lunch tomorrow anyway. Okay, Dad? (*turns to go*)

ONE:

And you forgot these. (*Holds up two coins.*)

SEVEN:

My allowance!

SIX:

Sylvia?

SEVEN:

What?

SIX:

Thank God for you, Sylvia. (*SEVEN exits.*)

From off:

SEVEN:

Bye, Margaret. Hey, take one of these. You can use it in the bird seed machine.

IV.

FIVE:

(entering) Margaret, you're still here? It's getting dark.

SIX:

So?

FIVE:

Hasn't shown up yet?

SIX:

I don't know. Maybe.

FIVE:

A good day then?

SIX:

I don't know. Maybe. You?

FIVE:

Bad day.

SIX:

Oh? What?

FIVE:

Blew off an appointment. A promise.

SIX:

Blew it off?

FIVE:

Forgot it. I was in Chicago. Shopping.

SIX:

You and your shopping.

FIVE:

I know. It's like I'm addicted. But I'm going to quit.

SIX:

Cold turkey?

FIVE:

Cut up the cards. Mailed 'em back in.

SIX:

That may not be all there is to it, you know.

FIVE:

I know. I shop when I'm bored. What should I do when I'm bored?

SIX:

I thought you were helping Mark and Joe at the shelter.

FIVE:

Mark's going down south to help.

SIX:

Are you?

FIVE:

No. I have classes. (*beat*) I can't wait 'til I'm done with classes.

SIX:

You have to wait with your body.

FIVE:

What?

Epilogue

ONE:

The next question is obvious.

TWO:

Obviously.

FIVE:

How do you wait with your body? Don't get all cryptic with me.

THREE:

Then why don't they ask it?

FOUR:

Because they're amazed.

ONE:

No, because it's so... obvious. They didn't even have to ask.

SIX:

I just learned this, Molly. You wait with your body. You wait with a purpose. Waiting is active, not passive. While you wait, you serve. And all the time, time after time, you turn. You turn away.

FIVE:

Turn away from what?

SIX:

Isn't it obvious?

FIVE:

Not to me. It's not obvious to me.

TWO:

Maybe the question is obvious, but not the answer.

SIX:

Turn away from idols and toward God.

FIVE:

Sometimes you amaze me. I suppose you're calling shopping an idol?

FOUR:

What are the things that are God's?

ONE:

Well, things like... uhm... well, like –

TWO:

Turning, serving, waiting.

SIX:

I didn't say that.

FIVE:

I'll go down there with Mark. Is that good enough?

SIX:

Don't serve Mark, serve the living and true God.

FIVE:

Sounds like you've been reading the Bible, Margaret.

SIX:

I've been looking into the face of God, I think.

ONE:

Turning.

TWO:

Turning from idols.

FIVE:

Where? Where's God's face?

FOUR:

Serving.

TWO:

Serving a living and true God.

SIX:

Oh, it's here. God's face is here. God's face is... smiling on us. You can't see God now. But God *is* here.

THREE:

... and waiting.

SEVEN:

With your body! Who are you waiting for?

FIVE:

What are you waiting for, Margaret?

SIX:

I'm waiting for God's son from heaven.

ONE:

"Give therefore to God the things that are God's."

TWO:

Turning.

THREE:

Serving.

SEVEN:

Waiting.

FIVE is speechless.

FOUR:

When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

FIVE exits, alone.

END