

Banners – Seeing Is Believing

What you are about to read below are selected notes taken from a class taught by E. Charlotte Baker at Duquesne University, Pittsburg, PA on August 12-16, 1985.

I caution the reader to not dismiss this 24-year-old lesson as “out-of-date.” God’s word is timeless.

As God’s people, the time has come for us to redeem the visual arts for God’s worship and His purposes. We need to employ intelligence, skill, and anointing to redeem visual arts to divine service.

The challenge: If the church is going to become a force in our community, and really have dominion over the earth, then the church will have to become a cultural center.

Evangelistic impact: unbelievers are attracted to the beauty of artistic excellence. Excellence in all art forms can be striven for in the church without compromising our Christian testimony. The Mormon Church Tabernacle Choir and Orchestra know this. Their secular art is excellent. They are internationally popular not because they are Mormon, because they rarely perform anything that projects a Mormon message. Rather, they are listened to for the excellence of their music.

Banners . . .

First, the visual we are most familiar with is the “flag.” The ensign, banner or standard of bright colors and striking design which stands for the country’s land, its people, its government, and its ideals.

The Egyptians flew the first flag-like symbols many thousands of years ago. They tied streamers to the tops of long poles. Soldiers carried these poles into battle, hoping their gods would help them to win.

The poles, topped by the fan-like symbol of the Pharaohs, were supposed to bring victory. (Moses’ rod/staff was a banner. See Exodus 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 17, 21, and Numbers 17, 20 – Num. 21:8 Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole . . .) The people of Assyria and later the Greeks and Romans used symbols in the same way. Their symbols usually stood for their gods or their rulers, rather than for the people themselves.

Flags became important in battles for several reasons:

- 1) Identification - Soldiers carried them high and the generals watched the flags to see where their men were. (Flags have always been important in the armed forces. Most countries have separate flags for each branch of their armed forces and for top-ranked officers.)
- 2) Beacon – flags could be easily seen and therefore used to guide, signal, warn, inspire, and lead in battle.

- 3) Tactical - The flags showed which way the wind blew and this helped soldiers see the direction to aim their arrows and spears.
- 4) Morale -The flags came to stand for each side in a battle, so the fighting often centered around them. If the soldier carrying the flag was killed or wounded, other men would rush to keep it flying. They would “rally around the flag” to prevent the enemy from capturing it. If the flag was captured, many soldiers would give up the fight. (Have you ever played Capture the Flag?) It was a moral as well as military blow to capture the flag.

Another example we’re familiar with is the “standard.” Standards are the personal flags of rulers and important government leaders. For example, The President of the United States, even members of his cabinet have special flags. The Queen of England and members of the royal family have special flags. The queen’s flag, called the Royal Standard, is raised over a building as she enters it and lowered when she leaves.

Many personal flags are older than national ones. They developed during the Middle Ages. Nobleman flew banners of various sizes depending on their rank. An ensign -the symbol or token of office or authority – was employed.

It was assumed that all of the people grouped under a “standard” would seem to have the same “set of standards” (similar symbols and colors). When you would see the standard, you would immediately know what the “standards” of the people were. (What is your spiritual standard –can you be easily identified?)

Be thinking of spiritual applications for the scripture you will read below. The idea here is that there are spiritual implications to using visual arts in worship. Banners can be used to draw people to God - in whose presence, the wounded find healing, the broken and bound find deliverance and freedom, and the lost are shown the way, and the weary are inspired and strengthened to continue.

God assumes we have banners and below we are told to lift up, set up, display, and see them.

Banners/Flags/Standards/Ensigns/Signs and related Hebrew words . . .

- A. Strong’s 5251 – a flag, also a sail
- B. Strong’s 5264 – to glean from afar; i.e., to be conspicuous as a signal, to raise a beacon, lift up as an ensign
- C. Strong’s 5127 – to flit; i.e., vanish away, escape, chase, impel, deliver, flee, put to flight, lift up a standard
- D. Strong’s 226 – A signal (lit. or fig.) a flag, beacon, monument, omen, evidence, mark
- E. Strong’s 1713 – to flaunt (raise up a flag, to be conspicuous-set up with banners, chiefest)

F. Strong's 1714 – a flag, banner, standard

Scripture related to the above Hebrew words . . .

- A. Strong's 5251 – a flag, also a sail and
- B. Strong's 5264 – to glean from afar; i.e., to be conspicuous as a signal, to raise a beacon, lift up as an ensign
Psalm 60:4 A BANNER to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth
Isaiah 13:2 Lift ye up a BANNER upon the high mountain
Isaiah 49:22 I will lift up mine had to the Gentiles, and set my STANDARD to the people
Isaiah 62:10 Lift up a STANDARD for the people
Jeremiah 4:5 Set up the STANDARD toward Zion
Jeremiah 50:2 Declare ye among the nations, and publish, and set up a STANDARD
Jeremiah 51:12 Set up the STANDRAD upon the walls of Babylon
Jeremiah 51:27 Set ye up a STANDARD in the land-blow the trumpet among the nations
Isaiah 5:26 And he will lift up an ENSIGN to the nations from afar
Isaiah 11:10 And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ENSIGN of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek; and His rest shall be glorious. (Jesus becomes our banner.)
Isaiah 11:12 And he shall set up an ENSGN for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.
Isaiah 18:3 All ye inhabitants of the world, and dwellers on earth, see ye, when he lifteth up an ENSIGN on the mountains; and when he bloweth a trumpet, hear ye.
Isaiah 30:17 Till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ENSIGN on a hill.
Isaiah 31:9 And his princes shall be afraid of the ENSIGN
- C. Strong's 5127 – to flit; i.e., vanish away, escape, chase, impel, deliver, flee, put to flight, lift up a standard
Isaiah 59:19 When the enemy shall come in like a flood the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a STANDARD against him.
Ps. 60:4 Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth
- D. Strong's 226 – A signal (lit. or fig.) a flag, beacon, monument, omen, evidence, mark
- E. Strong's 1713 – to flaunt (raise up a flag, to be conspicuous-set up with banners, chiefest
Psalm 20:5 We will rejoice in thy salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our BANNERS.
Song of Solomon 5:10 My beloved is white and ruddy, the CHIEFEST

(standard bearer) among ten thousand.

Song of Solomon 6:4, 10 Thou are beautiful, O my love, comely as Jerusalem . . . terrible as an army with BANNERS. Who is she, looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with BANNERS?

F. Strong's 1714 – a flag, banner, standard

Song of Solomon 2:4 He brought me to his banqueting house, and his BANNER over me was love.

God sees banners filled processions as worship.

As a homemaker, I've battled dust for years . . . could it be that dust is worship? ☺

In Psalm 68:4 we read, "Extol Him that rideth upon the heavens . . . that rideth upon a 'great cloud of dust.'"

If you recall the nation of Israel in the wilderness, after their miraculous escape from Egypt, Israel marched through the wilderness, behind their banners (see Number 2). The entire Tabernacle of Moses was carried on the shoulders of the Levites – the tribe set aside for ministry – and there was a cloud created by the dust of their walking feet. And God saw that dust as worship and inhabited it – rode upon it! The tribes marched in holy procession behind their standards and God rode upon the marching of the people.

They moved in obedience to divine direction. They followed the pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day. God moved. The nation followed. That following produced dust. Dust was the evidence, the consequence of obedience and God loved it. We read in I Samuel 15:22 "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice."

(Are we providing an opportunity for God to ride on the great cloud of dust from our holy procession?)

God wants to speak through our banners.

BANNERS MAKE A STATEMENT. Banners are not decorations. They are spiritual tools with divine purpose. Ps. 29:5 And in the name of our God we will set up our banners.

Psalm 60:4 states, "Thou has given a BANNER to them that fear Thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth." The purpose of a banner is truth. But if truth is not birthed in to our hearts, it will not be displayed in our banners. We are only adding to our bag of tricks. Worship cannot be "added to" the church service – it is birthed in the church service. In awe of the creator God who loved us enough to send his Son, and as a love response to our Savior, we submit to the Holy Spirit and allow him to flow in us and through us in worship. We become " New Testament Levites" a royal priesthood, a holy nation – standard bearers. And as our ministry lifts our ensign – the Lord Jesus Christ – he will draw all men to himself! "I am the way, the truth, and the life!"

God's name is our banner . . . Jehovah Nissi

We read about the name that Moses gave his altar in Exodus 17:15. Strong's 3071 translates the name as: Jehovah is my banner.

Think about Moses' battle with Amalek in Exodus 17:8-16 The Lord our banner was revealed here. Moses lifts his banner (rod) on the mountain and Joshua wins in the valley. (Could there be a connection between our banners and the spiritual health of others in the valley?) People are affected by what they see. Visuals are important. (Can God bring victory through your visuals?)

John tells us that God is love also, and therefore, "His banner over us is Love" must be the message of the church. We still bear his name – all of them.

We have a promise in Isaiah of a second chance and the church (through God as our banner) can be a welcoming place - a place of second chances and rest.

In Isaiah 11:10 we read, "And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ENSIGN of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek; and His rest shall be glorious. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord *shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people* which shall be left from Assyria and from Egypt . . . and from the islands of the sea.

Use banners to lift up Jesus - to gather in, not divide – and to communication welcome and acceptance and support for the struggles of life.

God's banner causes men to fear

You can read these scriptures on your own, but there is an arrogance and a flaunting of power that goes with banners. Historically armies use banners to "psyche out the enemy." Banners are mentioned as such in Isaiah 59:19, Psalm 65:8, Isaiah 31:9, Song of Solomon – terrible as an army with banners.

The enemy has not feared the Lord or God's people because the church has not yet lifted up their ensign, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are not to fight the enemy, we are to lift up Jesus.

We forget that the enemy is not another member of the church's music department, but poverty, ignorance, and injustice. We forget that in our communities are lost and hurting people who need God. The church is all that stands between the evil and the vulnerable. Lift up Jesus!

John 3:14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

Reflecting Jehovah Nissi

The splendor of worship in the United Methodist Church should extol the attributes of God. But how do we proclaim His excellence? Do people see His marvelous creativity in our worship?

In banner making, color, fabric, shape, text, and trim material to tassels, etc. all have meaning. The question is how to use these elements mindfully to express the character of God and further the kingdom of God.

Not only does the **work** of our hands need to do this, but also our **walk**.

I know you've heard it before, "You may be the only Bible some one may ever read."

The bottom line is we must continue to be good advertisements for the kingdom of God and out of our walk our message is birthed. Out of relationship with God comes creativity and banners.

God has promised us that we are up to this call.

Zechariah 9:16 And the Lord their God shall save them in that day as the flock of his people; for they shall be as the stones of a crown, LIFTED UP AS AN ENSIGN UPON THE LAND.

Isaiah 60:1-5 Arise shine for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

Zion is spoken of in this same way with the exact same words. A city set on a hill. A beacon. Psalm 50:2 states, "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined.

(When was the last time you thought of yourself as "the perfection of beauty"?)

II Corinthians 4:6-7 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this reassurance in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.

When the people of God ascend into the presence of God and lift up Jesus (lifting up our hearts in our hands -Lamentations 3:41) the world will see the light of Christ.

The True Standard will be raised – one not made of cloth.

Seeing is believing.