

SUNDAY WORSHIP AT THE SALEM UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Last Tuesday, at the workgroup meeting, I told John Nelson that I would be visiting his old church on the 2nd. He told me jokingly (and reassuringly?) “You won’t stand out!”

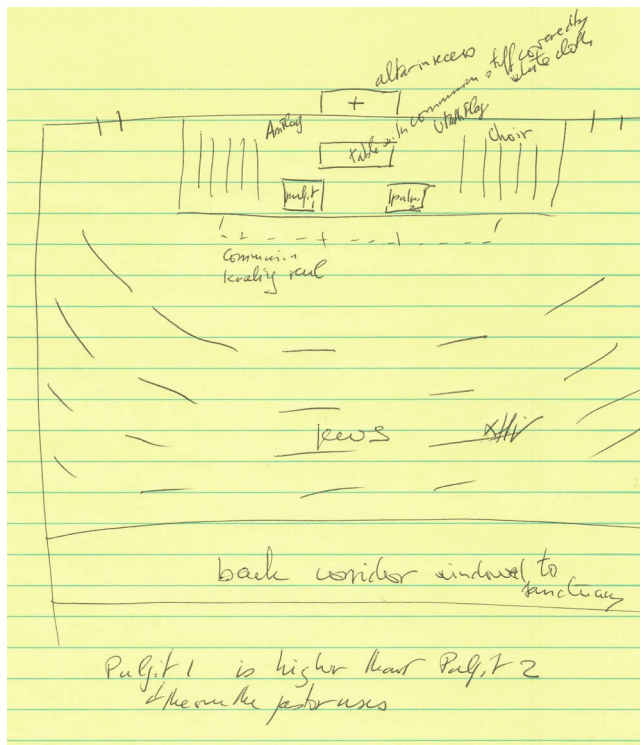
126P

{of course, a statement like that is also a warning and a suggestion that one might need instruction, all in the “etc mode”}

10:30

306

I reached the church about then, noticing again the worn aspects of the doors, paint, etc. As I moved from the entry corridor into the sanctuary and an elderly lady dressed in white greeted me.



{it appears to be the sign of a special status in the church but it looks very much like a 1950s nurse uniform. Later I also note that the ladies in white are further divided in terms of the caps they wore}

166P

{note that, white is the marked category. Everyone I met here is black unless mentioned otherwise}

669

She was very friendly, gave me the bulletin and order of service. We had two or three exchanges about where I should sit (me: “I do not want to interfere with where people usually sit.” she: “sit where ever you are comfortable” all in the most pleasant, smiling of ways.) I sit on the middle right, in a pew three of four rows from the back.

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{(=The service ||has not begun | the service has not begun||has not really begun=) in other words: there are at least three patterned positionings for “has not begun”: 1) early arriving and chatting; 2) pre-service with piano singing and sitting of various groups; 3) organ prelude. After the organ prelude there are further starting positionings }

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At that time about two dozen elderly women (few if any men) are chatting in groups of three or four in the last three of four pews. Two white women are already there. Two more come soon after.

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10:45

young white man comes in, sits at the end of same pew I am in
more elderly come in, some men

10:50 a lady starts playing the piano, and then singing while a man sets the microphone in the space in front of the rail.

{(=The service ||has not begun ||has not really begun=)}

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another lady goes around distributing another booklet. When she comes to me, I am confused and she has to repeat whether I want the communion service order. I accept it (it is marked "do not take out of the sanctuary).

The piano lady starts singing "What a friend we have in Jesus." No flourish; some people in the audience join her softly while other continue to converse among themselves

an asian couple comes in, sits in middle middle row
a dozen children and adolescents enter as a group with two or three adults from the door on the right of the altar

another white couple

one of the singing leaders:

"Thank you Lord!"

"Anyone wants to say Thank you Lord?"

No response

leader says "I do" and improvises a prayer

sings "How great thou art"; few join

a dozen whites in tourist mode

most of the people who were chatting in the back rows have distributed themselves in the middle middle rows.

033

A dozen or more women in white uniforms come in together from the door to the left of the altar.

The leader starts the “Our Father”

The piano lady and the man at the microphone leave the stage while the organ starts. This moment is listed on the “Order of Worship” as the first of three steps in “The approach to worship”.

{(=The service has not begun=)}

The procession organizes itself in the back of the sanctuary.

Allen Pinkney walks in through the door on the right. He is by himself, dressed in a Ph.D. like robe. We look at each other and we exchange a nod while smiling {he remembers me}. He joins those at the back

Young women dressed in surplices light candles at the altar

11:07

an organ flourish and the choir starts singing.

The procession moves to the front

from the back, AP says “We gather here today” some reply “Amen”

{(=the service has not really begun=)}

there are at least 200 people in the sanctuary (by the end perhaps more). At least 25 people (including choir, etc.) are the altar area (none white)

A hymn is sung while the procession reaches the altar and AP gets into the pulpit. All verses and good participation my all.

{like all hymns, this one is from the 1890s. At least two of the about 10 that were sung was in 6/8 time which made them sound like waltzes, somewhat incongruously to my religious experience.}

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As per Order, “call to worship” and various prayers, hymn, and psalm

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{(=The service has begun -)}

AP: (towards the end of the introduction) “we have many visitors today. Those of you who are joining us today for the first time please stand” I stand along with most of the whites. We are “welcomed” and a lady comes around to give a pen with the inscription “Compliments of SUMC”

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AP gives announcements about events, among them:

- . The leadership retreat next Saturday: everyone is welcome
- . Next Sunday after the service a special meeting in the hall to discuss the financial situation
- . Schedule for special concert in some other location, the first as part of “community outreach”

While he is making these announcements four young white people come in (two of whom will keep falling asleep), then a white couple with child

extended greeting among the people in the sanctuary. A lot of walking about, including by AP who covers the whole sanctuary. Many people come to shake my hand “Welcome!” “We are so glad you are visiting.” This lasts at least 5 minutes, maybe more.

Tithes and offerings

{I ask wordlessly for instruction about what to do with the plate and it is confirmed that I am to pass it down the row}

While this is happening a professional sounding singer starts a complexly orchestrated song in jazz/gospel. He accompanies himself from the secondary organ near the piano in front of the altar area. He is joined by the choir.

{This is the kind of performance that requires extended rehearsal.}

There is some co-occurring audience response (hand clapping, raising hands, singing softly along) and applause at the end.

There is an asterisk in the Order at the point stating in parenthesis and italics “*(*Persons wishing to enter or exit may do so at this time.*)” Some people enter. None leave

12:03

{(=the service has **really** begun=) all discourse is now explicitly religious}

AP starts the sermon. He reads the sermon very dramatically, in a more and more “black” style as he progresses. It is a discussion of the gospel text on the cure of the blind man and his examination by the pharisees. The title is given as “from seeing to believing to glorifying.”

Hellen Keller

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“from our black history” Stevie Wonder, Ray Charles

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from handicap to God’s handiwork

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blindness of the flesh: computer games, rap, ... racism, classism, gender

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Jesus is the one

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Salem, we have work to do

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Salem, we have been chosen

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{the order has a page for sermon notes. One young woman near me is taking notes}

At regular intervals AP asks “do I have a witness here?” many respond “yes!” “Amen!”

Are you a pharisee or are you a blind man?

“They come like tourists to a service, paying attention”

12:30

at least a dozen of the whites leave in various groups. Only about 6/8 remain

AP going on (he did not mark the leaving of anyone)

I am not a hip hop artist but I will try a rap

rhymes a few sentence

Some applause

“Amazing grace ...” he recites (not sing) the first verse with some joining him

“Magnify the Lord”

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{(=the sermon is finishing=)}

AMEN!

{(=the sermon is finished=)}

12:45

Invitation:

“If there is someone who ...”

The organ plays softly in the background

about a dozen elderly more men than women come forward and kneel at the rail, some with a woman standing behind them with a hand on their shoulder.

AP improvises a prayer for about 5 minutes

“you may go back...”

“Our Father...”

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Ministry of the sacrament (following the U.M. 1992 Book of Worship that was distributed earlier)

{closely similar to the Catholic canon}

AP recites the first part to the elevation, the whole congregation the second part

{no evangelical overtones in delivery or responses}

After the Our Father, the communion starts. This is a long process during which 5 hymns are sung. The process starts with the two girl acolytes lifting the white cloth from the table in front of the altar revealing the bread and (I am sure) juice to be used for communion. They also lift the white cloth off the railing where a set of little cups are already set.

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People begin moving forward by going to the back of the church and going down the center aisle. They are directed to kneel at the rails by the railfull. “Please kneel” After they have knelt a minister (several will cycle) says something about the bread then the wine. “Now arise and go in peace” As the people live another railfull goes through the process.

In the middle of the process the person to my left leans towards me and asks “do you want to partake?” I decline. I note that about 6 of the whites and the 2 asians do go to the rail.

The white clothes are replaced.

AP: “our closing hymn is ...”

{actually there are several calls to end, as there were several beginnings}

At the end of the outgoing procession AP stands at the back left, actually by himself for a time. I take the opportunity to go to him. He says something about being surprised to see me. I smiled and tell him something like “No, I said I would come and here I am!” I ask him whether I could attend the leadership training retreat. He says yes and guides me to the lady (across the sanctuary) who might help, Mrs. Zonora Hamm.

I go to her, stand for a second as she talks to a man about her car not starting because the battery was dead. She turns to me and I ask “Mrs. Zonora Hamm, Rev. Pinckney told me ...” She seems enthusiastic about my joining the retreat, jokes that she was surprised I knew her name, and then says that, actually she has to talk to another lady who is making the arrangements and has the directions. I go with her to this other lady, Mrs. Evelyn Brumson, who is talking to still a third. They are similarly enthusiastic about my coming. I get the directions to the United Methodist Conference Center in White Plains.

Zonora Hamm e-mail: ladyzonora@aol.com
Mrs. Brumson cell phone: 917-991-9197

I offer to drive anyone who need a ride and my name is put on the list. I give one of them my card and point at the e-mail address.

I then leave.

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