

From the Choir Loft:

When the choir is on summer hiatus, I enjoy worship from a different-than-usual perspective ... from a pew. While I still appreciate worship there, I do miss my usual seat ... at the end of the second row in the choir loft. And as is often the case, it is when I lose it that I appreciate it the most.

You see, from my summer pew I can see Tim's face and maybe a worship leader, or a soloist sitting in the choir loft. But, unlike anyone else in the congregation, during the school year, we in the choir can see everyone's face ... from the choir loft.

Only from the choir loft, can I see the growing frustration on the young mom's face as she bounces her crying, fussing baby. And on the face of the grandmotherly lady sitting in front of her, I can see memories of days gone by in the way of a smile. It makes me smile, too.

Only from the choir loft can I be immersed in the spectacular inspiration that is the stained glass window ... the glorious reminder of the tradition and the eternal life we share in our church. That medley of light alone is capable of immediately changing the demeanor of my day. It's greets me warmly and emphatically when I turn to face it after processing to the choir loft and it welcomes me openly as I recess into its light at the end of worship.

Only from the choir loft can I see Clara's seat in the pew halfway back on the left side ... the first seat. And I wonder if the person sitting there knows whose seat he's in. I wonder if he knows about Clara's passion for music, especially organ music.

Only from the choir loft can I see all the different ways our congregation members sing hymns. Some bury their noses in the hymnals and never come up for air. Some who don't sing read along and some just stand, waiting for the singing to be over. Some sing with their heads held high, seeming to feel every glorious word passing their lips. And some, the very few, simply can't stand still while they're singing. They're moving and swaying from the first note to the implied "Amen".

Only from the choir loft can I see the emotion-filled face of the soloist turning to sit back down, with tears welling in her eyes.

Only from the choir loft can I see the smile of satisfaction, of pride, of devotion on our director's face and a hidden thumbs-up or a silent "thank you" at the end of a well-offered anthem.

Only from the choir loft on an Easter morning, can I find myself awash in celebration by a full sanctuary joyously proclaiming "Christ the Lord is Risen Today". And I'm torn between joining in the singing or just letting myself be carried away by the jubilant voices and trumpeting organ.

Only from the choir loft can I informally take attendance each Sunday morning. The empty spots are just as telling as the full ones. Some are vacant for just this week and I wonder where life has taken them today. But others spots are eternally empty, even if someone's temporarily sitting in them. There are so many people I miss. And as my glance passes from face to face I'm sorely reminded that there will be so many more that we will miss. More than once those glances have encouraged me to search out a particular face after worship to share something I want to make sure they know ... even a simple "thank you". The church family is always evolving ... while the memories are always growing and fading.

And the people NOT sitting in their assigned seats? ... well they simply make taking attendance much more difficult, and they stand out just as pointedly as do the visitors whom I need to remember to greet at the end of the service.

Only from the choir loft can I see the faces bursting with good news ... the ones that can barely stand to wait for Joys & Concerns. But I also see the faces of ones who carry a heavy burden on this day ... someone whose usual smile is buried under concern or sadness ... someone who needs a hug after church.

Only from the choir loft can I get an up close view of the organist's face (although it's a little harder with Mia). The awe I feel of someone being able to tell ten fingers and two feet to perform in different directions and rhythms at the same time is confirmed by the concentration on her face. Passion and devotion are surely the source of this gift they give us every Sunday.

Only from the choir loft can I see the faces of those sharing Communion ... especially those who have truly reached out to touch Jesus on this morning ... those who inspire me to do more than just dip a piece of bread into grape juice.

Only from the choir loft can I see Tim preaching in the pulpit ... not just from the chest up, but all of Tim. And when he delivers a message that nudges us out of our comfortableness, I allow my eyes to leave Tim and check the reaction of the congregation. Body language is a very interesting, and telling, phenomenon. My scans of the congregation make me wonder what I'm inadvertently telling others.

And finally, only from the choir loft, or at least near the choir loft, do I have the privilege of bathing in the glory of Christmas Eve ... to look upon a room filled with faces extolling the Peace of Christmas ... lit more by expectancy than a flickering flame ... sharing "Silent Night" not as a song, but as an experience ... where they are ... right then ... right now