

How many of you have seen the musical, CHICAGO? It's got to be one of my all time favorites. I really enjoyed Richard Gere's performance as the sleazebag lawyer who was willing to do whatever it took to get his oftentimes flagrantly guilty clients acquitted.

Give 'em the old razzle dazzle
Razzle Dazzle 'em, Give 'em an act with lots of flash in it
And the reaction will be passionate.

It's a great song, brilliantly performed.

Give em the old razzle dazzle. I sometimes think that we folks in the church tackle mission and evangelism with the same approach. Do whatever it takes to lure em into the pews, razzle dazzle em, give em an act with lots of flash in it, and their reaction will be passionate. Give em snow in a southwest Florida sanctuary in July. Memorize a gospel text or two. Guaranteed to mesmerize the audience and drop a jaw or two.

It's kinda like a dog and pony show, folks. Showmanship for the sake of the sacred.

Something akin to the opening acts that precede the entrance of the blockbuster headliner superstar. Engaging the people in order to put them in a more receptive mood to what you want them to take delivery of in the first place.

God's extraordinary, radical, overflowing, copious grace.

Why do we have to engage them? Why go through all the gyrations and orchestrations? Let them simply show up for worship . . . or not. Forty or fifty years ago, they didn't need dog and pony shows. People came to church. . . because that was what you did on Sunday. But in the last few decades, we have lost whole generations at worship. It has become commonplace for children to grow up in homes that are godless. And perhaps that's why despair, dejection and depression are so rampant in societal ills. We are trying to bring a message of joy into a generation of desolation. And it is a generation that doesn't necessarily want to hear our message. So. . . sometimes takes a little bit of razzle dazzle.

Did you listen to today's text?

A large crowd had been following Jesus because they saw the signs he was doing for the sick. Jesus was curing lepers, giving sight to the blind foreign t, curing

infirmities, restoring withered limbs and deformed spines, even reviving the dead. Talk about razzle dazzle.

The generation that encountered Jesus was no different from the folks of today. Some authorities surmise that the Hellenistic culture present in Israel had seeped into religious praxis. The old faith of the Bible was no longer practiced by the masses. Another scholarly viewpoint paints first century Jewish peasants as victims of a ruthless Roman political machine that taxed them oppressively, and an elitest religious system whose leaders made their burdens even heavier. What was clear was this: Keeping laws and traditions had occluded people's relationship with God. They had grown discouraged, and despairing.

Jesus was the incarnation. He was the bearer of the Word. He might have used the signs as his opening act, but His bottom line, headliner message was, love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your mind and all your soul, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus mission: to give a disillusioned generation new ears to hear and new hearts to respond. And to do this, he was prepared to razzle-dazzle. Pay attention here. He was testing Philip when he asked him where they might buy food for the crowds. Jesus himself knew what he was going to do before he posed the question to Philip. If simply feeding a hungry crowd was his goal, he would have had the means to obtain the necessary food. But he needed to get their attention! He needed to disciple the disciples, and he used the old manna from heaven routine, you know, the one that Moses came up with on God's Sinai desert tour.

Seriously now. Of all the signs Jesus did, this feat of feeding five thousand people with five barley loaves and two fish gives us more insight into the heart of God than we realize. An insight for all the ages, and every people. God can take the ordinary and make it extraordinary. God can take the ordinary and make it extraordinary. He can take a little and make a lot. He can transform hopelessness into hopefulness.

God uses our scarcities and make them sufficiencies. Remember, God doesn't call the equipped. He equips the called.

All our Lord asks is this: report for duty. Just offer him what you have at hand. Not a feast fit for a king, but just a fish and a couple of loaves. There are still crowds following Jesus because they have seen or heard of the signs he is doing. We are the church, yes. But we are also that crowd. We are his disciples, but we are also his discipled. We come to share, but we also come to hear.

So what do we do when we hear, “we need to give these people something to eat.” And we respond, “give them something to eat???? We have no money, we have no time, we have no food, we have no cooks, we have no servers, we didn’t go to cooking school. Now you know I’m speaking figuratively here. Fill in the blank, folks. We focus on our scarcities, our poverties, our insufficiencies. And we hang onto them. That’s the point. We hang onto them.

But all he is asking of us is simply that we offer something, meager or lacking as it might be. . what’s that? You say you can’t take on the whole harvest ministry because you don’t have the time, you don’t have the skill, you don’t have the stick-to-it-of-ness. Then help for a weekend. Or make a delivery. Or hand out a brochure. You only have to offer a simple fish or a meager loaf. He will supply the rest.

God makes the ordinary extraordinary.

God makes us more than the sum of our parts. Exhibit B: Jesus took the loaves and looking up to heaven gave thanks. Then he broke them and distributed them. And when all had eaten their fill, the disciples gathered up the fragments and there were twelve basketfuls left over. Not only did he feed a throng on five loaves and two fish, they ate their fill and there was lotsa leftovers.

God makes us more than the sum of our parts.

You find out as a solo pastor that the time you need to prepare a sermon isn’t always available when your creative juices are flowing. So you can sit down on your appointed sermon writing day and come up with writer’s block. Prayer, perspiration, heart palpitations and it’s in the wee hours of Sunday morning and you still have a tabula rasa. (blank page). A feeble idea comes. You can’t even stretch it to 500 words. It’s lacking depth, it’s lacking study, it’s lacking style. You can preface this message by explaining: well, my computer crashed, my printer jammed, the dog ate the only copy. But you preach it, and you pray the spirit will find some place to shine through it.

If they could throw tomatoes at the preacher, this is a sermon that could envelop you in the fruit of your labors. Yet, oddly enough, as you greet the people leaving the sanctuary, you hear. . .thank you Pastor. That really hit home. Good message, pastor. It made me think. Thank you Pastor, it spoke to me.

God makes us more than the some of our parts. And thank God he does!!

An old man was often seen visiting an old broken pier on the eastern seacoast of Florida. Every Friday night, until his death in 1973, he would return, walking slowly and slightly stooped with a large bucket of shrimp. The sea gulls would flock to this old man, and he would feed them from his bucket.

Years before, in October, 1942, Captain Eddie Rickenbacker was on a mission in a B-17 to deliver an important message to General Douglas MacArthur in New Guinea.

But he made an unexpected detour. One that would become the adventure of his life.

Somewhere over the South Pacific his plane lost radio contact and ran out of fuel. The men ditched their plane in the ocean. For nearly a month Captain Eddie and his crew had to fight the water, and the weather, and the scorching sun in their life rafts. They spent many sleepless nights flinching against the attack of giant sharks ramming their rafts. The largest raft was nine by five. The biggest shark...ten feet long.

But of all their enemies at sea, the most formidable was starvation. Eight days out, their rations were long gone or destroyed by the salt water. Only a miracle could sustain them.

Rickenbacker recounts, "Cherry," that was the B- 17 pilot, Captain William Cherry, "read the service that afternoon, and we finished with a prayer for deliverance and a hymn of praise. There was some talk, but it tapered off in the oppressive heat. With my hat pulled down over my eyes to keep out some of the glare, I dozed off."

Something landed on my head. I knew that it was a sea gull. I don't know how I knew, I just knew. Everyone else knew too. No one said a word, but peering out from under my hat brim without moving my head, I could see the expression on their faces. They were staring at that gull. The gull meant food...if I could catch it."

And the rest, as they say, is history. Captain Eddie caught the gull. Its flesh was eaten. Its intestines were used for bait to catch fish. The survivors were sustained and their hopes renewed because a lone sea gull, uncharacteristically hundreds of miles from land,

Sometimes it is 2 fish and five barley loaves. Sometimes it is a lone seagull.

God's razzle dazzle.

Rickenbacker never forgot God's gift of the seagull. Every Friday at sunset...on a lonely stretch along the eastern Florida seacoast...you could see an old man walking...white-haired, bushy-eyebrowed, slightly bent. His bucket filled with shrimp. Shrimp to feed the gulls...to remember that single off-course tern, which like the young boys loaves and fish, provided the small meal that God extended. A small offering that sustained the lives of the men of the Flying Fortress.ne

Paul Aurandt, "The Old Man and the Gulls", [Paul Harvey's The Rest of the Story](#), 1977, quoted in [Heaven Bound Living](#), Knofel Stanton, Standard, 1989, p. 79-80