

Form and Function in Iambic Pentameter
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UU Church of Minnetonka
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READINGS

SONNET 73

William Shakespeare

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou seest the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire
Consumed with that which it was nourish'd by.
This thou perceivest, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

From *An Organic Architecture* (1939)

Frank Lloyd Wright

<http://www.pbs.org/flw/legacy/essay1.html>

“So here I stand before you preaching organic architecture: declaring organic architecture to be the modern ideal and the teaching so much needed if we are to see the whole of life, and to now serve the whole of life, holding no ‘traditions’ essential to the great TRADITION. Nor cherishing any preconceived form fixing upon us either past, present or future, but—instead—exalting the simple laws of common sense—or of super-sense if you prefer—determining form by way of the nature of materials...”

SERMON***Form and Function in Iambic Pentameter*****Reverend Kent Hemmen Saleska**

It was my fortune years ago to be
 an English major. What a great degree
 with which to validate my existence!
 I've no regrets, lo these many years hence,
 though skill with words and knowledge of authors
 emerged only in trivia. Yet for
 all it's esoteric manifestations,
 I've come to love the literate creations
 of words and poetry, and all the strength,
 emotion, rage or love that moves us to cry
 or action. Bottom line or down the length
 of time, this is more than a feeble try:
 it is the power of the pen. It is
 the power of our words, the way we choose
 each line. But I was unprepared for this:
 this new direction that would be no cruise.
 Last February at our church auction,
 Bob Dachelet purchased my only gift.
 Each year I offer a sermon for sale
 and this year makes it my third time around.
 I like to think I have a way with words,
 at least a moderate facility
 to blend reflection and some challenge for
 the future of this church, but also with
 capacity for holding pain and love
 so near. So with a spirit of great joy
 and anticipation, I enter boldly
 into the auction fray. Imagine my
 surprise as Bob announced his winning hand,
 and stated his challenge for me to write
 a sermon written in a style of old,
 well-known and used by him we dub the bard:
 his name is Shakespeare and the style he wrote
 was then and now and forevermore a form
 we all call iambic pentameter.

At first I was disappointed and felt
 mere form would not be strong enough to make
 a sermon. Function is, and content is
 the primary aim of my Sunday talk.
 Or so I thought. As I began to think
 upon this challenge I soon came to see

that what we strive to do each time we meet
 here on a Sunday morning is to recognize
 the passage of our weeks, the passage of
 our lives, marked in seven day increments.
 Of course we also seek, explore and find
 new views and ways to challenge hearts and minds.
 And yet to hold a service, worship here,
 without a form is like removing all
 those elements we cherish from our daily
 lives, from our weekly work, or from the year
 we cycle through. Remove the morning news,
 eradicate the morning coffee, take
 away the morning kiss of husbands, wives,
 of partners, children, then – what other things
 are great and small and designate a time
 that brings us comfort or a sign reminding
 us who and where we are? Maybe it is
 vacation each and every year to one
 particular small lake or cabin, tent
 or home that signals summer's fine'ly here.
 These are the places and the times that mark
 the stories of our days. What better way
 to emulate the cycles we live out,
 and make them holy and to consecrate,
 than this our worship as we gather here?

And so it was that as I thought upon
 this challenge Bob had wrought, it soon became
 a joy that set my mind awl. It gave
 a vision, place and time where I could give
 my rambling thoughts a forum for display.
 I must admit, I've never had a challenge
 so quite like this. I've memorized my lines
 in sev'ral Shakespeare plays, and when I was
 in seminary we were taught some ways
 where we could shape a worship to reflect
 a form that, with attention and with craft,
 is narrative or story, deductive,
 inductive, or what was given the name
 "transconscious" (though I still don't quite yet know
 what that description means!). Yet nonetheless,
 iambic pentameter was never
 a form that I considered would enter
 my ministerial sermonic bag
 of tricks, my repertoire of revelation,
 my elixir of evangelization!

When I consider worship here, or in any context, the sermon I prepare is a form that flows with function, whether filled with spirit or with education, or as the case may be, with more a prophet call some politics or human rights I feel we need to see. The purpose of the sermon is all these things and more: a major task, unlikely as it seems, is to attempt to name our vision and our work, and how that fits within our faith and history. Essentially this is a primary format to shape our whole identity. These topics and these tasks, they are aligned with prose, at least within this context here. It doesn't seem as though a steady rhythm or even beat, would fit our Sunday morn each week. Today, however, I can see a pattern and a place where form like this can fit with grace.

As you can see and hear from readings that I shared, as Frank Lloyd Wright once wrote, that "form and function are one" piece, despite what cherished tradition would hold. Lloyd Wright insisted not that we should rail against a modern form, but simply that organic architecture is a way "exalting simple laws of common sense."

The message today is a story told about this church: our seasons and our cycles, our leaving and returning, searching and yearning, whether to be or not to be within intentional community. To model this, in function and in form, our choir today prepared an anthem that is named, "Come in from the firefly darkness." The words to this are quite remarkable and fitting for our fall (though this whole song, once sung, recalls new lilies of the spring) because the lyrics tell the story of our gath'ring after wand'ring once again. You see, as Mark, our choir director, said one day to me: this autumn season is

our church's spring, for this is when we bloom to life once more. And though our summertime is slack, and though I hold and always will that this – our spiritual life – does not go on vacation, still there is a truth, in fact, that autumn brings us home once more into this place, this time-worn hallowed hall, that's consecrated by our pain and love, made sacred by the many births and deaths and lives lived in between, and baptized by our tears of grief or laughter.

Here it is

we celebrate our days in ritual,
and also in events spontaneous.
But here we also have a structure to facilitate our function. Here is where we also enter in to various commitments. Often it (this winding search) will take a path progressing from some questioning, uncertainty, and more deep exploration. One thing almost all will have in common, though, is that they come amid a life transition: moving homes, or having children, getting married or a recent sad divorce, or a lost job or maybe finding one. These are the things we need to know receiving people here.

Our work as members is to make a space where new visitors may find a place, to know that when we truly welcome those who venture through our doors, we open ourselves to transformation. And in return we challenge them, as much as charge ourselves, so over time eliminate the false distinctions between “us” and “them.”

The progress on the path of membership evolves uniquely for each person here. It may be that a prolonged careful dance is what you need, or maybe quicker runs your race. But one thing that we ask for sure, when you decide to join, is to commit, in some deep way, to congregation life.

For those of you who are new to this place,
or even if you know this whole place well,
I want to take a few moments of time
to share with you the opportunities
available within this congregation.

A multitude of choices open to
you here today: so take the time to hear
the possibilities on this display.
The structure of our growing church is such
that leadership is spreading. We hope more
and more empowerment is felt by each
small group or large. The point is to remove
all micromanaging, reaching fingers,
allowing those participating to
be able to interpret the church mission
and use the gifts they bring in service to
our larger gathered church community.

The two most prominent of entities
within our church that lead us on our way
is first the Board, the visioning body,
and then Church Council, running daily things.
In metaphor, the Board may be compared
to the body's brains. The Council, though, may be
compared to the beating heart: they pump the life
throughout the church, through arteries and veins,
and even reach the capillaries in
the far-flung tips of our extremities.

So our Church Council is composed of now
Eight Ministries. This year the Council is
all new, so everyone is learning well
and sharing need. So in the alphabet's
clear order, I will list the work they do:

[Go to next page]

Communications Ministry is first.

This group promotes our news, events and more, especially our website, soon to be a more efficient and accessible, and interactive site. And Stephanie Wallingford is this group's Facilitator.

Community Ministry comes up next.

Deanna Johnson guides this group as their Facilitator. This group looks inside and fills our needs within, like caring for our friends and members, and making parties fun.

Facilities and Operations is

our next good **Ministry**. Lee Kaster and another guy, Pete Connors, run this thing. But they would very much appreciate experienced and learned folks to help keep up this church. Maintaining all the grounds and building is hard work!

Next **Ministry**

is **Finance**, which has a few good members, the needful thing, however, is they need a Facilitator! As you might guess, they oversee financial stewardship and canvass here, and even Capital Campaign funds dear.

Our **Lifespan Religious Education**

is the fifth listed **Ministry**, and they develop teachers and curriculum, from little babies up to old adults. Our Nora Lundquist is the one who is Facilitating here. They always are in search of folks who teach, so sign right up and you can be a peach!

A new group formed this year is **Membership**, a **Ministry** formed from Community.

Susanna Preseller Facilitates this group. Their current work as greeters is just part of what they do. They also help to teach a class called UU 101, presented twice each year.

Our Social Action Ministry

is gath'ring lots of steam. You heard of our Empowerment Workshop, and we hope that you join in this communal work to help us set the course of our congregation's life. This Ministry does more and more each year, like Habitat and Interfaith Outreach. John Crosson does facilitate this group, so go ask him if you want to learn more.

So finally – the closing **Ministry**: the **Worship Arts** is always close to my heart. Jon Bidler is facilitating, but soon he will leave because his wife and he will have a baby when October comes! So here, in truth, we have an open slot. Please speak with Jon or me if you want a shot. In Worship Arts we oversee three things: the first is sound, the oh-so-new system; the second is the ushers that we need; the third is new, a new evolving bunch, Worship Associates by name.

And so,
that is the list we have for you today.
We ask that you engage a deep soul search, considering your gifts, and needs of church. Imagine something you would like to do, and then join in with heart and mind held wide.

And so it is, as I step back and look at all we do and say, that I can't help but come to see a larger rhythm here. The form of church is wide and deep and varied, but ultimately what it does – at least if it's done well – is open up and pave the way for function. Here, in church, I know that people don't just join to hop in one additional committee. Here we come to grow in faith more deeply at our core. The systems we create and fill are not for us just to maintain. Like practicing piano, it gives us some exercise,

but our large goal, yes larger still, is more
than that by far. It's here we come – at least
the way I see – for growth down in our soul.
And through this clear and weekly discipline,
we also may reach out, connect and grow.

Some say that iambic pentameter
mimics the beating of the human heart.
The beat, some say, is the tha-thump of blood,
and on the page it elevates to art.
As I reflect on this poetic tool,
comparing function and its cohort, form,
to structure in our church, it is not hard
for me to see comparison that's warm.
The form of lovely poetry and church
is to maintain a clear and crystal frame
through which a vision, beauty, or our work
may flow with ease our action to proclaim.

What Frank Lloyd Wright (a Unitarian!),
once said makes total common sense to me.
He said that form and function flow as one.
The beating heart within the pounding words
is so akin to my experience
of cycles and of seasons and the flow
within the church each day and week and year.