



One Page Sermon

By Pastor Robb McCoy

August 13, 2023

All Good Gifts

Godspell

Scripture: James 1:16-18

Of all the shows that we have presented this year and last year, *Godspell* has a special place in my heart. It is the only musical play I've ever been in. I've been a part of four different productions of *Godspell*, performed at three different Quad City churches. This show has been the impetus of several important friendships, and is a big part of why our youth group will begin working with another local group this school year.

It's also unlike other shows because it is the only one that is explicitly Christian themes— it's practically in the name. Based on the parables of Jesus, it is also unique in that it doesn't follow a strong narrative arc and it doesn't have a lot of character development. Instead it is a collection of vignettes as the players, acting as disciples, "put on" the parables of Jesus. The show is about building a community through story, play, and fun.

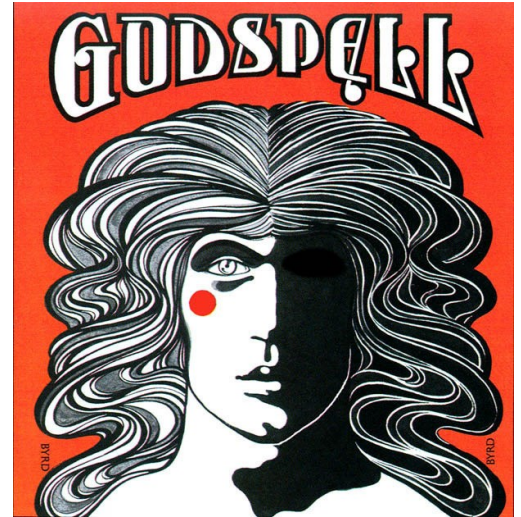
There is, however, some tension created in the story as Jesus builds this community of play and love. There is external tension that leads to the Cross. There is also internal tension within the community that is centered on the John the Baptist/Judas character. Yes, in *Godspell*, these two important figures are combined into one. The one who calls together the community at the beginning of the show ("Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord") is the same who eventually leaves the group and betrays Jesus to the leaders who want him dead.

The tension first appears in the song and dance duet "All For the Best," as John/Judas and Jesus show their different understandings of what the Kingdom of Heaven should be. John seems to be advocating for an economic revolution. He wants social justice and is frustrated with Jesus being content with building community and telling stories.

Immediately after this, one of the players sings "All Good Gifts." After John points out the injustice of the world, the response of the group is one of thanks. *Godspell* presents Jesus as one who built a community of love that would survive beyond his life. It is not a social-justice Jesus. Instead, it is Jesus who creates a counter-cultural loving community.

The Book of James is a popular one among Christians who seek social justice. The most famous verse in James is "But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?" (NKJV). This feels like the kind of social justice that John demanded in *Godspell*. At first, it feels like there would be tension between this sentiment and the kind of community-building that "All Good Gifts" seems to model.

Yet James only gets to "faith without works is dead" after including in his letter, "Every good gift... comes from above." James begins with giving thanks—an acknowledgment that all things come from God. The foundation of James's letter is that God only gives good things. Begin with good gifts. Begin with thanks. Begin with building community, caring for one another, playing, creating, and fun together. Then the justice comes. Faith without works may be dead, but justice without love can become vengeance. Start with the good gifts of heaven, and allow ourselves to be the seed scattered in the field.



With music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz, *Godspell* premiered in 1971, opened on Broadway in 1976, was made into a film in 1973, and was revived on Broadway in 2011.

**Next Week: The Gospel According to Broadway:
The Full Monty; 1 Kings 19:9-15**