

EASTER 5 B

1 John 4:7-21

The Guest of the Maestro

What happens? When a dog interrupts a concert?

To answer that, come with me to a spring night in Lawrence, Kansas.

Take your seat and Hock Auditorium

and behold, the Leipzig Gewandhaus orchestra –

the oldest continually operating orchestra in the world.

The greatest composers and conductors in history

have directed this orchestra. It was playing in the days of Beethoven.

(Some of the musicians have been replaced).

You watch as stately dressed Europeans take their seats on the stage.

You listen as professionals carefully tune their instruments.

The percussionist puts her ear to the kettle drum.

A violinist plucks the nylon string.

A clarinet player tightens the reed.

And you sit a bit straighter as the lights dim and the tuning stops.

The music is about to begin.

The conductor, dressed in tails, strides onto the stage,

springs on to the podium, and gestures for the orchestra to rise.

You and 2000 others applaud. The musicians take their seats,
a maestro takes his position, and the audience holds its breath.

There is a second of silence between lighting and thunder.

And there is a second of silence between the raising of the baton
and the explosion of the music.

But when it falls, the heavens open and you are delightfully drenched
in the downpour of Beethoven's Third Symphony.

Such was the power of that spring night in Lawrence, Kansas.

That hot, spring night in Lawrence, Kansas.

I mentioned the temperature so you will understand
why the doors were open. It was hot. Hock Auditorium,
a historic building, was not air conditioned.

Combined bright stage lights with formal dress and furious music,
and the result is a heated orchestra.

Outside doors on each side of the stage were left open
in case of a breeze.

Enter, stage right, a dog. A brown, generic, Kansas dog.

Not a mean dog. Not a mad dog. Just a curious dog.

He passes between the double bases and makes his way
through the second violins and into cellos.

His tail wags in beat with the music.

As the dog passes between the players, they look at him,
look at each other, and continue with the next measure.

The dog takes a liking to a certain cello.

Perhaps it was the lateral passing of the bow.

Maybe it was the eye-level view of the strings,

Whatever it was, it caught the dog's attention

and he stopped and watched.

The Cellist wasn't sure what to do.

He'd never played for a canine audience.

And music schools don't teach you what dog slobber might do

to the lacquer of the sixteenth-century. Guarneri cello.

But the dog did nothing but watch for a few moments and then moved on.

Had he passed on through the orchestra, music might have continued.

Had he made his way across the stage

into the motioning hands of the stagehand,

the audience might never have noticed.

But he didn't leave. He stayed. At home in the splendor.

Roaming through the meadows of music.

He visited the woodwinds, turned his head at the trumpets,

stepped between the flutists and stopped by the side of the conductor.

And Beethoven's Third Symphony came undone.

The musicians laughed. The audience laughed.

The dog looked up at the conductor and panted.

And the conductor lowered his baton.

The most historic orchestra in the world.

One of the most moving pieces ever written. A night wrapped in glory,
all brought to a stop by a wayward dog.

The chuckles ceased as the conductor turned. What Fury might erupt?

The audience grew quiet as the maestro faced them.

What fuse had been lit?

The polished, German director looked at the crowd,

looked down at the dog, then looked back at the people,
raised his hand in a universal gesture and...shrugged.

Everyone roared.

He stepped off the podium and scratched the dog behind the ears.

The tail wagged again. The maestro spoke to the dog.

He spoke in German, but the dog seemed to understand.

The two visited for a few seconds before the maestro

took his new friend by the collar and led him off the stage.

You would have thought the dog was Pavarotti,
the way the people applauded.

The conductor returned and the music began,

and Beethoven seemed none the worse for the whole experience.

Can you find you and me in this picture?

I can. Just call me Fido. And consider God the maestro.

And envision the moment when we will walk onto his stage.

We won't deserve to.

We will not have earned it.

We may even surprise the musicians with our presence.

The music will be like none we've ever heard.

We'll stroll among the angels and listen as they sing.

We'll gaze at the heavenly lights and gasp as they shine.

And we'll walk next to the Maestro, stand by his side,
and worship as he leads.

... See the unseen and live for that event. [We are invited]
to tune our ears to the song of the skies and long –
long for the moment when we'll be at the Maestro side.

He, too, will welcome. And he, too, will speak,

But he will not lead us away. He will invite us to remain,
forever his guests on his stage. Amen.