



**“Church Bells still ring in Brooklyn”
Christmas Morning.
December 25, 2016.
Courage Church, Detroit, MI**

Ephesians 2:19-22 -

“you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Before we moved to Detroit to Pastor Courage Church, our family lived in Brooklyn, NY.

We lived in a very special place... a neighborhood near the East River called Carroll Gardens, on a quiet street called Luquer Street.

If you were to walk out our door, and turn left you would walk through half a block of beautiful city row homes and brownstones, before hitting Court Street, a street filled with shops and restaurants.

Across Court street is a record store/Pour over coffee shop called Black & Gold. Its an amazing little place totally uniquely combining two of the greatest things in the world, music, and coffee.

If you were to look from our street toward that coffee shop, and look to the right (standing across the street from the record store), on the next corner stands an absolutely beautiful old Catholic Church, that still has an amazing bell tower.

Every hour, on the hour, church bells sound for one minute in our neighborhood. It is amazing. The church is just at the end of our block, but the sound resonates as far as to where Milly went to school several blocks away, maybe further.

And every Saturday night, at 7pm the bells play amazing music for a few minutes, likely leading up to their church service. It's so nice, to just sit at the window and hear the chimes ringing a beautiful melody that fills the air stretching across Carroll Gardens. It made me feel like I lived in the 1950s... When the entire neighborhood went to church... and the bells were their cue... "we better get in there! we don't want to miss out on what the Lord is doing today."

and the same bells, throughout the week would ring hourly signifying the start of a new hour... but signifying *much more* than just that.

It was an hourly reminder that the church is just up the street.

So there are Two Things that church bells tell us that are so significant:

1. They tell us when church is about to start.
2. They *remind us* that the church is there.

So every single day we were greeted with the sounds of hope filling our quiet neighborhood... and though not everyone there would say that they go to church, most people sure appreciated those bells.

And How this simple sound has the power to make the *entire neighborhood* feel a little bit more safe... and the power to make us all feel like we are all a part of a family with people we have never met but who we live amongst... *that is* unexplainable to me.

But it is powerful. It is unifying. It is beautiful.

One of the most beautiful memories of our time in this neighborhood came on the last Christmas Eve we would spend there.

We lived in a Brownstone style row home, it was an old classic Brooklyn house that was broken into three apartments, we lived on the second floor and there were families on the first floor and the third floor as well, but both families had went out of town for Christmas so on the night of Christmas eve, after we put the kids to bed and Dawn and I decided to wrap the kids presents in the hallway.

We kind of pretended that we had the whole house to ourselves... when really we just had our second floor apartment and the stairway.

So we set up in the stairway. And we wrapped presents and drank sparkling water and enjoyed a New York Christmas eve together.

Wrapping. Talking. Dreaming. Getting excited for the time we would share with our children the next day.

We had great plans, to have our own Christmas meal, to open presents in the morning, and to take a bike ride in the evening 6 miles across Brooklyn to a neighborhood called Dyker Heights, which is world famous for the extensive, over the top Christmas decorations on all of the homes there.

and the day turned out to be one of the greatest Christmas' days ever but it started that night in the hallway. Wrapping presents. and drinking water.

and then, the clock hit midnight.

and in that moment, in a way that couldn't have been more perfectly scripted in a Hollywood movie, the church bells began to play Christmas carols, I can only assume it was signifying the start of midnight mass.

And we could hear the bells from inside the halls of our little row home, and I ran downstairs and opened the door to find Christmas music filling over the entire neighborhood. and Dawn came down and joined me, and we sat on our front porch, and listened as bells filled our entire Brooklyn neighborhood with the reminder that a child has been born.

and suddenly me... a guy in his 30s, for the first time in years felt the wonder of Christmas *again*.

The wonder of the story of a child... that was God himself. Born into chaos for the purpose of restoring it.

and I became so filled with Joy, that church bells still ring in Brooklyn.

Taking us back to a place when Christmas meant something to everyone... it meant that hope had arrived...

taking us back to a place when those bells meant something... it meant that *the light of the world is still shining bright*.

Detroit used to be filled with many churches like that. With towering bells that sang melodies throughout neighborhoods... and yes, some still exist, some even still ring...

but as most of us know, time has not been generous to *many* of those buildings.

Some have been torn down... others sit, waiting to be torn down or possibly restored if someone will take it on...

and it can be easy to drive by these old landmarks, and peak your head in the windows and look at the decay that has become of what used to be the most majestic properties in our now broken city...

and it can be easy to think to yourself... church bells just don't ring in Detroit, anymore.

But I am here to tell you something.

Church bells still ring in Detroit.

and you are the ones ringing them.

and you are bringing wonder back to children... and hope into parents who haven't heard a *bell ring*, some of them in decades. Who haven't been able to give their children a Christmas from the moment that they were born.

You are bringing wonder back to some of the children whose Fathers are in prison, and whose moms are working three jobs just to keep the lights on.

and Who forever have felt like "life is just not turning out the way that it is supposed to..."

But when the world feels the darkest, the light shines the brightest...

Just like Isaiah say in his famous prophecy about the birth of Jesus (Isaiah 9:2) "the people who walked in the land of darkness have seen a GREAT LIGHT!

and that I am so proud to be a part of a church who absolutely insists on being that light at Christmas time.

You were able to be a part of our church blessing some of our own families in *our* community, whether they needed it or not... just because we want to bless each other, and show each other what Jesus looks like through radical generosity.

Because we don't need bells to remind people that the church is right here.

a couple brief stories...

as most of you know, we adopted several families last week, and Dawn and I got to go deliver one...

So the team filled up Mohan and Freddie's SUV to the top with presents hand selected for their family, and then Dawn and I went with Freddie to deliver them...

and I didn't see his face in that moment, but Freddie said that when this teenage boy saw that SUV door open and He realized that he wasn't just getting a present for Christmas... but we were filling up every bit of space underneath that Christmas tree in his house with presents for him and his family...

she said that the look on his face is something she will never forget.

and you have helped create that moment, and moments like that, that even when there aren't cameras there to capture it... when you see the way that someone responds to the generosity being shown to them, a still frame of that becomes frozen in your mind and it never leaves you. The reaction of utter joy that nobody can fabricate.

Spencer was telling me about a house that *they* delivered to... and the delivery team was carrying the presents toward the house and offered to carry them all the way inside but the family stopped them at the door and said "its fine... just leave them at the door."

and so the team unloaded cars full of presents at the door... and this family, showing gratitude but remaining calm, carried in the presents on their own.

and the moment that every present was inside, and they shut the door... from the sidewalk all our team heard was screams of joy and excitement coming from inside that house.

It is so much more than the idea that we are giving these families a bunch of stuff...

stuff does not garner those types of reactions...

No. These shouts of joy said one thing clearly...

“We are going to have *Christmas* this year!”

and that is what church bells sounded like in Detroit this Christmas season.

Reminding our community that the church of Jesus Christ IS here. We are open. and we are FOR THEM.

the church is alive, and it is well.

and even though many of the old buildings with the old bell towers have eroded and decayed and have come to ruin... some have collapsed into the buildings that can no longer support them...

the church of Jesus Christ is still singing...

Because the church is not a building it is a body.

and instead of just singing “Joy to the World” in a four walled room where our voices can echo and we can feel good about themselves...

this church brings Joy to the World!

One family at a time. One backpack at time. One kid at a time.

It was so amazing to go home that day, after we all shared stories of the endless smiles on children’s faces and the endless gratitude of parents...

to be able to go online, and see a video of the way that Mount Hope, our parent church in Lansing, adopted and blessed several families in amazing ways... and it left me thinking...

church bells still ring in Lansing.

and I saw a video of our friends in New York, and their massive toy drive that they did at the Chelsea-Eliot houses, which is known for its crazy disparity between rich and poor with projects on one side of the street, and literally across the street lie 10 million dollar brownstones... but I watched that video realizing...

Church bells still ring in the Chelsea-Eliot houses.

and I saw pictures that Pastor Matthew at the Dream Center posted... a church that Dawn and I were a part of for years, and are constantly inspired by how much they are able to do, because it is always done in total faith! and I saw how they were able to give 2,000 bikes to kids in their neighborhood on Sunday... and it left me thinking...

church bells still ring in Los Angeles.

what an honor to be a part of a body that loves people tangibly.

Church bells still ring in Detroit.

Reminding us that the things that **matter**, *can not be destroyed* by time, looters or fires.

The wonder of Christmas rests in generosity. and On the message that God would *give* to a broken world, His only son, to eventually be broken by it.

And the thing that is so amazing about that verse in Ephesians is that the cornerstone of the temple we, collectively are building is Jesus Christ... which means that when you get to Christmas and the church comes together and it functions the way it is supposed to function,

it is all on account of this child.

Jesus came as a gift... the greatest gift. and then he gave us a gift... his life... the greatest gift.

And I love that in our community, the only way that we can respond to that level of selfless generosity, is to get as close as we can to matching it with the way that we live our lives.

Because HE is the cornerstone!

So may you today, as you leave here, enjoy the time with your family... knowing... that because of what you were a part of...

there are families all over our neighborhood and our city enjoying Christmas with their families today.

Because Church Bells still ring in Detroit.