

A “HUG” for everyone

“If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” **2 Chronicles 7:14**

The words recorded in 2 Chronicles tell of the consecration of the Temple. Built to the Glory of God and for the purpose of reminding God’s people that God had a dwelling among them. Built in a time when the world was in great need, a time of famine, peril and pestilence. A time of great unrest. A time of upheaval, change and uncertainty. Yet one thing remained constant – God’s Love for His Children.

“What the world needs now is Love, Sweet Love.”

Hal David and Burt Bacharach collaborated to write and compose many songs for many years, but the song, “What the World Needs Now”, recorded and released in 1965 by Jackie DeShannon, is one that has had the most lasting impact.

What the world needs now is love, sweet love
It's the only thing that there's just too little of
What the world needs now is love, sweet love
No, not just for some, but for everyone

Lord, we don't need another mountain
There are mountains and hillsides enough to climb
There are oceans and rivers enough to cross
Enough to last 'till the end of time

What the world needs now is love, sweet love
It's the only thing that there's just too little of
What the world needs now is love, sweet love
No, not just for some, but for everyone

Lord, we don't need another meadow
There are cornfields and wheat fields enough to grow
There are sunbeams and moonbeams enough to shine
Oh, listen, Lord, if you want to know

What the world needs now is love, sweet love
It's the only thing that there's just too little of
What the world needs now is love, sweet love
No, not just for some, oh, but for everyone

What the world needs now is love, sweet love

If we reflect on the world situation from 1965, we recall our country was experiencing much change – We were engaged in the Vietnam War, which lasted from Nov. 1, 1955 to April 30, 1975, according to the dates finalized by the Department of Defense in 1998. America was also continuing to evolve and define itself as a nation founded upon the principles of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness as described in the Declaration of Independence and framed into the fabric of our Constitution. In 1965, the country faced many challenges and social changes – changes and challenges that arose in an attempt to be a beacon of liberty and freedom.

1965 was also the year Ellis Island was made a part of the National Park System. Ellis Island was the first and largest federal immigrant processing station, receiving over 12 million future Americans between 1892 and 1954, when it was abandoned. The site became part of the National Park System by Presidential Proclamation in 1965, and was reopened to the public in 1990 as the country's primary museum devoted entirely to immigration. Ellis Island is also the home for the Statue of Liberty. A symbol of the ideals for which America stands.

In 1903, a bronze tablet was fastened to an interior wall of the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. Cast as a part of the plaque was a poem written in 1883 that has become the credo for thousands of immigrants coming to America.

The poem, "The New Colossus," was written by Emma Lazarus to help raise funds for the construction of the statue's pedestal. Today, many people think of the statue and poem as inseparable. The title of the poem and the first two lines refer to the Colossus of Rhodes, which was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The poem talks about the millions of immigrants who came to the United States (many of them through Ellis Island at the port of New York).

The "air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame" refers to New York City and Brooklyn, which were consolidated into one unit in 1898, 15 years after the poem was written.

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.

"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

While the United States has its roots in being a welcoming place for immigrants, that hasn't always been the case. As a wave of new arrivals flooded U.S. shores in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a movement to restrict who was allowed into the country took hold as well.

In 1882, Congress enacted the Chinese Exclusion Act, the first major federal law to put immigration limits in place and the only one in American history aimed at a specific nationality. It came into being in response to fears, primarily on the West Coast, that an influx of Chinese immigrants was weakening economic conditions and lowering wages. It was extended in 1902.

Other laws followed, like the Immigration Act of 1917, which created an "Asiatic Barred Zone" to restrict immigration from that part of the world, and the Emergency Quota Act of 1921, which limited the number of immigrants from any country to 3 percent of those people from that country who had been living in the United States as of 1910.

The 1924 Immigration Act capped the number of immigrants from a particular country at 2 percent of the population of that country already living in the United States in 1890. That favored immigrants from northern and western European countries like Great Britain over immigrants from southern and eastern European countries like Italy. It also prevented any immigrant ineligible for citizenship from coming to America. Since laws already on the books prohibited people of any Asian origin from becoming citizens, they were barred entry. The law was revised in 1952, but kept the quota system based on country of origin in the U.S. population and only allowed low quotas to Asian nations.

"The American children of Italian and other European immigrants fought for the system to be changed", said Mae Ngai, professor of history and Asian American studies at Columbia University. The political leaders who agreed with them saw it in the same terms, as a change needed for equality's sake, as well as to be responsive to shifting relationships with nations around the world.

Speaking to the American Committee on Italian Migration in June 1963, President John F. Kennedy cited the "nearly intolerable" plight of those who had family members in other countries who wanted to come to the U.S. and could be useful citizens, but were being blocked by "the inequity and maldistribution of the quota numbers."

Two years later, in signing into law a replacement system that established a uniform number of people allowed entry to the United States despite national origin, President Lyndon B. Johnson said it would correct "a cruel and enduring wrong in the conduct of the American nation."

Also in that era - President Lyndon B. Johnson collaborated with Congress until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed and signed into law. The Civil Rights Law affected the nation profoundly as it for the first time prohibited discrimination in employment and businesses of public accommodation on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. Johnson worked with Democrats and Republicans from across the country and invested significant political capital to pass the Civil Rights Act.

Is there a lesson from history to be learned in 2016? Unless you have been dwelling in a cave or on a remote uninhabited island, you know that 2016 is an election year in our country. You also know that last year campaigns began and debates were held -many varied positions, propositions and proposals have been espoused by those hoping to be elected. Regardless of your political affiliation or voting preference, I believe you will agree with me that in this election year we might benefit from listening to and trying to enact the words and intentions of that song recorded and released in 1965 – “What the World needs now is love, sweet love, no not just for some but for everyone.”

The crisis of ISIS and the threat of terror from without and within, the seemingly endless escalation of tension between different “groups” of people, the senseless acts of random violence committed day in and day out, the tension between police and communities, Ferguson, Philadelphia, DeKalb County, Georgia and the unending stream of debates over immigration control, gun control, climate control, border control, speech control, political control, etc... It seems as if the whole world is out of control, and it may well be out of our control, or is it?

What if everyone, sought “to be in control of their own thoughts, words and actions?” What if the world could be changed if we sought to “get right” with God and with one another? What if that could begin today? Here’s the GOOD NEWS – You can!

On Thursday, February 18 @ 6:30 PM Rome First, is hosting Hearts United Gathering in the Wilder Center. Hearts United Gathering (**HUG**) is an event aimed at opening an ongoing conversation between all interested citizens of Rome to come together and celebrate our city and its citizens. **HUG** will feature music by LIFE (a band of local high school students who love to play music and who love one another.) The speakers for **HUG** are a dynamic duo from Mississippi - Dr. Otis Pickett and Mr. Justin Jones-Fosu. Mr. Jones-Fosu and Dr. Pickett are regulars on college campuses and gatherings across the nation. They share their personal journey as well as helping people see the need for Biblically based reconciliation through a better understanding of God’s Word, history and how to move forward. One is a black northerner and the other a white southerner, but together they are Christians who are on a mission to help God’s people break the racial divide and come back together. **HUG** is a collaborative event sponsored by One Community United and hosted by Rome First UMC. It is one step towards What the World needs now – It’s Love, sweet Love!

I invite you to join me in praying, seeking God’s face and turning from wicked ways as we ask God to heal our land. I hope you will join me in being a part of **HUG**. It will be an historic event in Rome’s History. History is filled with challenging times. Times of great unrest. Times of upheaval, change and uncertainty. Yet one thing remains constant – God’s Love for His Children. I look forward to celebrating God’s Love with you in worship every Sunday and with our neighbors for **HUG** on Thursday, February 18 @ 6:30 PM. For more information on **HUG**, see the **HUG** letter in this same edition of the HERALD or our website!

Shalom,
Robert ><>