

# Flash Mob

## “Get into it.”

### James 5:13-20

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November 20, 2011  
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#### Messiah

Last year when malls began to swell with shoppers wanting to get a jump on their shopping, something happened. It was lunch hour and the Welland Seaway Mall’s food court was full of people sitting at their tables, cardboard and paper wrappers opened before them holding fast food like nests. Children were bouncing out of their seats...and in – like they were tethered by springs – as seasoned parents caught and drew them back again. Signs of food venders surrounded them: Arby’s, Gino’s Pizza, Famous Wok. You could hear the din of the crowd...

...when the song started.

At first it was unassuming, like music on an elevator. The “Hallelujah Chorus” from Handel’s *Messiah*, if you know the tune: a fitting melody for a place already fresh with Christmas decorations.

The volume increased without much notice when a young woman, cell phone at her ear, sang out in stunning soprano: Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah! A tenor stood up from a table across the court, answering her call. More singers joined the song; and more: people rising from their tacos, standing on tables, turning from the trash – trays full of paper still in hand.

It was a **flash mob**: choir members gathered by some digital call through email or phone, transforming an ordinary scene with a surprise. Before long life wasn’t life as usual. A hundred voices singing. Who knows? Probably some: not members of the choir. Cameras were out. Hands held cell phones high taking video. By the finale, hands were waving and people were giggling, tears moistened eyes; no doubt a few noses ran.

In just a year the You Tube video has had at over 35 million hits.<sup>1</sup>

That day a food court became a church.

Church, because two or three or three hundred were bound together at the sound of the Messiah's name. Church, because it was eruption in praise for Christ. Church, because *something was happening* and they were moved.

### **Flash Church, Smart Church**

Imagine. *Something* was really happening. For five minutes the distinction between Heaven and Earth wore very thin: the line blurred. For five minutes shoppers forgot about lists, and retailers stopped worrying about business volume and the bottom line. For five minutes it was all adoration and wonder and joy.

All kinds of people from all kinds of places had somehow come together. For five minutes something greater than themselves held them all together. Something was happening. And that's what it means to be church.

What if church was where you could count on something happening? What if church was not a weekly or monthly obligation because your mother told you to? What if it wasn't boring sermons and outdated liturgies? What if it wasn't classes you'd go to if and when the schedule would permit? – what if it was something you just wouldn't want to miss?

What if church was where you knew the line between Heaven and Earth would blur?

I think that's what the writer of James thought church could be. *'Should be.*

So this little letter about praxis – the everyday practice of your faith – winds up by saying how we do this thing together.

James says that all this is not something that we should just talk about. Because you know and I know that we can talk up a good story. "Church should be this and it shouldn't be that and if we do that, don't count me in..." James is much more concerned about *what we do* than *what we say we should do*.

*Pray.* Don't just study it, analyze it, evaluate it. Mostly: just do it. When you do it together, heaven happens and it becomes an expression of truth.<sup>2</sup> Like you're in a mall and everyone starts singing the "Hallelujah Chorus" and you discover yourself together with all sorts of people who are caught up in the same expression of joy. Together, you're singing to God.

If you're sick, don't get stuck in criticizing God for tempting you; and don't get distracted by retaliating against the source of your pain. Just let your cries reach for the ears of God; and since God has a huge soft spot in the heart for people who are suffering you'll get blest.

If you're feeling good, share it with songs of joy. Others can't help but join in. It'll lift them in God's blessing, too.<sup>3</sup>

If you're sick: it's up to you to call on leaders of the church to come and pray for you. They'll come with their touch and will prove that church is different. Every other kind of community unaffected by the ministry of Jesus will exclude the sick, isolate them, forget them. Church is the one place that will focus on the hurting and prove that we are bound together no matter what. That's the kind of character we have to have if we follow Christ.

The last thing James says is that faith set into motion will call us together to confess our sins to each other, encourage each other, and rescue each other every time anybody needs it.

If we, each of us, were to let loose with that kind of venture – well, James says something is bound to happen.

The ordinary will be electric with the presence of God. The distinction between Heaven and Earth will dissolve. "Lord God Omnipotent, reigneth. Hallelujah!

Like a flash mob, followers of Christ are called together to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary presence of God. This is what we do as we carry out our everyday practice of faith.

### **Blessing**

Here's what I mean. Dian Wurdock makes these Circle of Care cards: large paper decorated with expressions of love and hope for members and other people we know who are suffering. They're put where members of the church can sign them during Fellowship Hour: mostly with just names and sometimes with short notes of encouragement. Then they're sent to the people. I've seen them posted on walls of hospital rooms and apartments.

Not long ago we heard that the mother of Fred Bowden, one of our staff members, was undergoing tests and being treated for a serious illness, so we've been praying for

her from time-to-time. I just asked Fred how his mother was doing, and after reporting on her health he added: “and by the way, she got the card from the church and she was so thrilled. She loved it.” Especially she loved its message: connection with a community of believers holding her in prayer.

He told me they’re getting the card framed.

It’s like it and the prayers it represented is a powerful source of healing, capable of bringing her the powerful presence of God.

A blurring of the lines between Heaven and Earth.

Flash mob. Turning the ordinary to the extraordinary: if you believe it...

if you live it...

that’s church.

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<sup>1</sup> Debra Van Brenk, “Handel’s Flash Mob A You Tube Smash,” The Toronto Sun, December 1, 2010.  
<http://www.torontosun.com/news/canada/2010/11/29/16368791.html>. To see the video, go to You Tube, “Christmas

Food Court Flash Mob, Hallelujah [Chorus](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXh7JR9oKVE) - Must See!”  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXh7JR9oKVE>

<sup>2</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, “The Letter of James,” The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary, vol. XII. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. © 1998. p. 222.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.