

I miss Good Friday

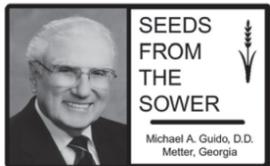
By Clif Martin

When I was young, a hundred years ago or so, Good Friday was a big deal. Everything stopped from noon to three. Stores and offices closed so people could go to any of the three-hour services held in some churches, with a different area minister speaking each hour. Good Friday was a part of the Easter story. You couldn't have one without the other.

The big downtown churches featured renowned pulpit orators of the 30s and 40s during those services. In Detroit, the greatest Good Friday noon service was at the Fox Theater. I vividly recall listening to the radio broadcast of those services from the Fox with my mother. It was on WWJ, the station owned by the *Detroit News*. I don't know if anything like that was done in other large cities. I can still see the little Detrola radio that sat on the refrigerator. I even remember the name of the organist who played the mighty Wurlitzer organ at the Fox for those services. How could I remember a name like Ole Foerch from 70 years ago? Back in radio's golden era, many stations had full orchestras and Ole Foerch, who had been a Detroit theatre organist, directed the Detroit News Orchestra that played on WWJ.

I don't recall the names of the preachers we heard, but I remember being awed by their marvelous oratory as it came over the radio. Those preachers kept voluminous files of memorable and relevant illustrations that I loved. They often ended with a poem that perfectly capped a sermon that was a work of art. Maybe it was that Good Friday experience that started my love affair with radio that later took me to a station owned by the Methodist Church in Flint, beginning my nearly 50 years in that medium. Perhaps it had something to do with that young boy becoming fascinated with theatre organs many years later.

I suppose one of the preachers might have been Rev. Merton S. Rice, pastor of Detroit's Metropolitan Methodist Church for 30 years. Named one of the 25 most influential preachers in America, he grew Metropolitan's membership from 300 to 7,000 before he died in 1943. Will any of today's high powered mega-church preachers become that important in American life? Will a commercial radio station broadcast a three-hour Good Friday service from a theater? We still have our Easter eggs and Easter bonnets, but I fear that observance of Good Friday has gone the way of so many grand traditions that are too Christian for today's multicultural society. I miss it all and I am thankful that I was privileged to experience it. •



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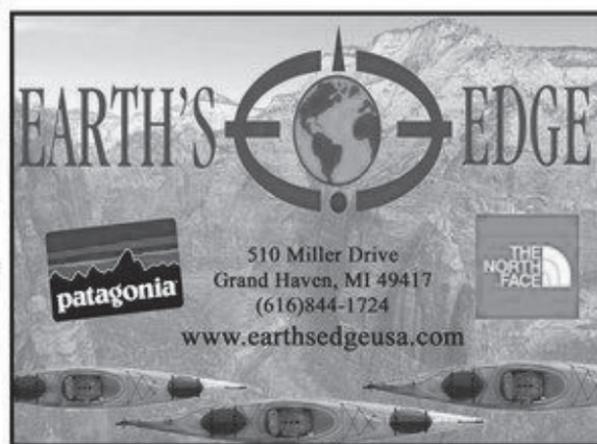
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