

LET THE SPIRIT BREATHE . . .



“COME, LET US BOW DOWN IN WORSHIP . . . FOR HE IS OUR GOD.”
PSALMS 95:6-7

Creator God, only you are worthy of my worship. Let me come before you with humbleness of heart and praise you for all that you are and all that you do. Amen

This month . . . Reflections on ❧ *The Heart of Worship* ❧

In Humbleness of Heart

“Worship is the common and inclusive word for the life-affirming occasions (rituals) when the Church gathers in public assembly to express their faith (liturgy) in praise, to hear the Word of God, and to respond to God’s love with the gifts of their lives.” David Ray

Communal worship is the act of coming together to praise the One who created us in his own image. As community, called together by God, we respond with praise to God’s love, we express the deepest needs of our hearts, our souls, as we prepare ourselves to serve others.

Worship is inclusive of ritual and liturgy. Rituals, physical in nature, are meaningful acts that help form us, help sustain us and become vessels for transformation. Rituals engage heart, mind and incorporate the senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell.

Liturgy, from the Greek ‘leitourgia’, meaning the ‘work of the people’, is a work of faith, given structure and expressed in words; scripture, homily, songs, readings, prayer.

Worship is communal, a shared act, a work of the whole body, with each person bringing their individual gifts to the worship experience and with an attitude or approach that there is nothing more important than that which is happening at the present moment. Worship is putting God first.

T. S. Elliot wrote, “What life have you if you have not life together? There is no life that is not in community. And no community not lived in praise of God.”

“The quality of worship emerges from the heart and its focus.” Adele Calhoun

Worship, if it is to be authentic, reflects who we are, encompassing our culture and time, where we reside and above all, our hearts and minds. Our worship reflects our three strongly held beliefs and established gifts from 1st Corinthians 13; faith, hope and love.

There is a story of an international worship service that revealed in a brief but profound moment an act of genuine worship. Worshippers were invited to come forth and place something in the offertory plate that represented their offering of themselves. An African woman, carrying a small baby, came forward, placed the plate on the ground, stood over it and said these poignant words: “I come and offer to God all that I have, my baby and myself.”

This woman and the psalmist express, “My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart . . .” (Psalms 51:17) Worship is our active response to God’s love with humbleness of heart. When we worship God we become aware of the enormous bounty of God’s grace while being ushered into His living presence.

Often times worship for us is just “going through the motions”. Worship takes some preparation on our part. How we live from Sunday to Sunday is preparation. Do our lives, our hearts, minds and hands, reflect the ‘spirit and truth’ of our worship? Take a moment to think about how you can better prepare yourself for worship?

Spiritual Reflections
January 2012
Harriet White, Evangelist



IN THE GARDEN . . .

The symbolism associated with the herb "bay" is glory and honor.

"An Offering of Worship"

Two worship services. The first, December 18th, Ogden Community of Christ and the other a Christmas Eve service in Portland, Oregon at St. Luke's Lutheran Church. Prelude music filled each chapel. Both worship settings were beautifully simplistic: the advent wreath and candles. Those gathered were small in number in the first service, while the latter congregation was large, two hundred and fifty or more. Officiating over the services were the pastors of each congregation. Each service of worship included the story of Christ's birth chronicled in Scripture and song.

In the first service our pastors recounted the scriptural story. I listened as the tenor and quality of their voices proclaimed the power and meaning this story held for them. When the Christ candle was lit, the entire advent setting was bathed in a dancing light of God's love and joy, His hope, His peace. As songs were sung, it seemed the room was filled with more voices than were present: angel voices joining ours to proclaim the birth of Christ. It was a marvelous expression of worship.

The service at St. Luke's included a few differences; a short homily, a bell choir, and Communion. This service, too, was a marvelous expression of worship creating the same spiritual intimacy richly experienced in my small congregation. What, I thought, helped to create this spiritual closeness in both services? It was apparent that the minister's humility of spirit, their desire to praise and serve God opened opportunities for true worship through their purposeful preparation and focus for each worship experience. The worshippers, their preparation and expectations to worship further enhanced the experience.

Few or large in number, Christ was experienced in each service through the grace of God and led by the Holy Spirit. When we gather in community, faithful in our yearning to worship God, there is, as was in these two services, the assurance of God's delight in our offerings of worship.

In perspective . . .

Authentic worship praises God, His Son, and the ever present Holy Spirit, leaving those who have come together in community feeling affirmed, healed, called and prepared to serve.



Humanity

Much advance publicity was made for the address the Master would deliver on "The Destruction of the World" and a large crowd gathered at the monastery grounds to hear him.

The address was over in less than a minute. All he said was:

These things will destroy the human race:

- Politics without principle,
- Progress without compassion,
- Wealth without work,
- Learning without silence,
- Religion without fearlessness and
- Worship without awareness."

Anthony De Mello from "One Minute Wisdom"

Scripture focus:

"Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only."

Matthew 4:10

"God is Spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." John 4:24

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." Revelation 4:11

"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire.'" Hebrews 12:28-29

"Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness." Psalms 29:2

"Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs." Psalms 100:2

"I was glad when they said unto me 'Let us go to the house of the Lord . . . to give thanks to the name of the Lord.'" Psalms 122:1 and 4

Reflection moment . . .

"If a church's worship lacks integrity, authenticity, hospitality, vitality, and faithfulness, it's safe to say these things will be lacking in the rest of its life."

David Ray, (Wonderful Worship in Small Churches)