



into the Melting Pot

the question is more important than the answer

Sunday 15 June 2014

Worship – what is it and can we make it relevant?

Just stand back from a 'typical' Sunday church service, and ask: Why do we do what we do every Sunday? What's it all about? Isn't it just a little bit strange?

And would you want to invite your friend along? Genuinely?

So why the strange mix of religious songs, 'old fashioned' or 'churchy' language, peculiar rituals, ceremonies, . . . ? Should we spending our time like this?

Background

The Hebrew word for 'worship' is rooted to 'service' as that of a hired servant.

In the OT, congregational worship was the norm, becoming more ritualised over time, until 'temple worship' took over with highly ceremonial activity (replacing the spiritual aspect) which became a vital factor in Jewish national life.

There were some prophets who spoke out against this, particularly Amos (see 5:21-24): I hate your religious festivals . . . let justice flow . . .

In the NT, Jesus showed that ritual was unnecessary and he re-emphasised the spiritual nature of worship, and the need for inner love and the devotion of the heart. Matthew 5:23 – make peace with your brother first . . .

The early church continued to be based around the synagogue for Jewish Christians, but Gentile Christians mostly met to 'worship' in house churches, without 'priests', with praise, prayer, reading Scripture and instruction. The sharing of a meal (formalised into the 'Lord's Supper') was often a part.

Romans 12:1 – offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service . . . this is the true worship that you should offer.

Over the centuries, religion has got in the way, and worship has become formalised, with books containing the set forms and words for every eventuality.

Questions

- What do we think worship is?
- Is this what God wants?
- What are the benefits of congregation?
- Should we be spending our time and effort in this way?
- Are other forms of worship equally effective, and what are they?

- How can we embrace contemporary theology when the setting is so historic?
- Why are most modern songs using old theology?
- How could worship be made relevant

From the meeting

What does 'Worship' bring to mind?

- Adoration, Praise, Glorify – all words that have a feeling of God 'up there', and for those present, lacking in relevance.
- Peace / Quiet / Meditation – more to do with 'God within' (Quaker services are still worship).
- The idea that 'worship' is more to do with 'being', how we 'serve' our God in the way we are, was seen as exciting.

The Early Church

They helped each other by sharing in common, praised God, read Scripture (the Septuagint), had instruction in the Apostle's teaching, shared a meal.

Over time, leaders became bishops and the meetings became formalised with creedal statements (the first – 'Jesus is Lord'), liturgy and the 'Eucharist'.

This very much underlines the 'religion getting in the way of faith' idea that we have met before.

Why do we come on a Sunday?

There is connection through community; the feeling of not being alone; having others around who love; having 'Jesus' sitting beside you (exemplified by the time people spend in the Café following On-Line – often as long as the time spent in the more 'formal' worship upstairs).

It gives a time to focus, to adjust perspectives, to learn how to 'be'.

If we had a blank sheet . . .

Involve food and fellowship (similar to in the Café between morning services), with optional activities such as Prayer, Songs, Bible Study, Writing Amnesty Letters, Adult and Children's Activities, . . .

Try to bring a balance to our 'worship' so that it isn't just the stuff of habit (dare we say 'tradition'?) but recognise our continuing daily activity beyond the church building as a more important part of our 'worship'.

--xx00xx--

We did not have time to tackle the perceived need (for some) to make church services of worship more contemporary by embracing modern theology and culture, and removing them from a centuries old setting which is so far removed from everyday life.