

Getting Back to the Work of Worship

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts. —Psalm 96:8

David danced before the Lord with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

—2 Samuel 6:14-15

In discussions of Christian worship, the matter of liturgy arises, and this interesting word has caused some confusion over the years. The word liturgy has become associated with fanciful and complicated orders of worship, full of congregational responses, chants and sung responses, extensive bulletin listings and all the trappings of high Church worship. We commonly refer to Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Episcopal and Lutheran practice as a liturgical style of worship, but in its most basic sense liturgy is a neutral term meaning the structure and style of any worship. High Church worship may have a distinct liturgy, but so does worship in any settings. Even a Pentecostal Church which may take pride in being low Church and having a non-liturgical style has definite liturgical form. Such a congregation may claim to be “led by the Spirit” and not by human planning, yet Pentecostal services of worship have their own distinct and even predictable structures and forms.

Students of worship are also quick to point out the most basic meaning of the word. Liturgy is a word of Greek origins which means “work of the people.” It is then pointed out that true worship involves congregational participation as all who enter into worship are to offer responses, songs and prayers. True worship is the work of the people. David reminded us of the work involved in praise when *he danced before the Lord with all his might*. I never got too excited about this “work of the people” lesson, until recently when it began to take on fresh meaning in these post-COVID days of emerging from a period of *work-less* worship.

The era of COVID took much of the work *out* of worship. In the early months of the pandemic many were missing worship completely while others were taking in a video worship service from the comfort of their own home. When we returned to gathered worship there was a great deal of work omitted. There was less greeting, less singing and with that less standing. No plate was passed, and no one came forward to receive the elements of communion. There was also less work for many who were to assist in

weekly services. We had no choirs which needed to rehearse, no ushers or greeters, and communion required much less effort to prepare as we began using sealed cups.

As the restrictions continue to lift, we are being reminded of the work which worship involves. Since gathered worship restarted, we have become more aware of all that is involved in getting up and making ourselves presentable. As congregational singing returns, we are doing more standing, and all the stanzas of the hymns are being sung. We are returning to three hymns per service, and as the once missing pieces are returned, we find that the services take longer. We say that we are glad to get back to the old ways, but truth be told, we may find ourselves missing the easier ways of the recent past!

What better time than now to consider afresh the work of worship? May this be a time to find new meaning in the weekly habit of rising, preparing ourselves and then presenting ourselves in the Lord's presence and among His people. Now is the time to stand, and to consider just what it means to rise and to stand in solidarity with Christ and His people. Now is the time to sing like we mean it, as a praise to God, as an encouragement to those around us (Colossians 3:16), and as a proclamation of the anthem of our life.

Does all of this worship feel like work? It is, and may you find new joy in this crucially important work for Christ! Come and worship, and if to a certain extent it feels like work, be glad. That's the way it is supposed to be.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

Grant, O Lord, that through our worship this day we may be awakened to that wonder of thy love for us; that familiar words may shine with new meaning, and that the habit of worship may be cleansed of all stale formality and mere ceremonial observance. Open our eyes to see thy loveliness and make our hearts to burn within us as thou doest speak thy word to us in this hour, so that in the wondering awe we may know ourselves forgiven, energized with new life and throbbing with new power. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

—Leslie D. Weatherhead, 1883-1975