

Words for an Emerging Church

Wednesday, July 14, 2021

Where Can I Go and Meet With God? (Are You Ready for the Answer?)

*My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
Where can I go and meet with God? —Psalm 42:2*

*And in him [Christ] you too are being built together to become a
dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. —Ephesians 2:22*

A recent Barna survey was taken of Church members to determine what they missed most over the past year of pandemic with its limited or eliminated worship attendance. Not surprisingly the survey indicated that 85% missed the social aspects of gathering with familiar friends, meeting new people, sharing thoughts and encouraging one another. What was surprising was learning that even *more* people (90%) missed gathering for worship because they felt deprived of the full blessing of the Lord's Supper, hearing a live message, group prayers and songs, and Sunday school lessons. They felt deprived of the full *spiritual* blessings of Church. In other words, to more fully experience God, gathering and place really matter!

This flies in the face of the popular understanding of matters spiritual. Nearly all believe that social needs can be supplemented by video connections, but that real human contact is very important. As for the spiritual, it is commonly said that this is a personal and individual matter, and that connections with the spiritual realm require little or no group assistance. According to this line of thought, one can experience God in their back yard as well as they could in Church, and though worshippers may gather in Church, there is no real significance to their being together. By this modern way of thinking people would miss the social aspects of worship, but spiritual experience could do just as well without the hassle of having to congregate.

Not only does this popular line of thought run contrary to the Bible, it apparently does not resonate in the hearts of all those surveyed! How crucial it is that we gather. In his Ephesian Letter Paul speaks of the Church as a people built together into a spiritual house where God delights to dwell. A scattered Church is not being Church as God would desire. We need to gather, for as we are joined together, God dwells and moves among us! Gathering and place matter! Granted, we have all had numerous and amazing experiences of God in the strangest and most unlikely places, and God has spoken to us in the quiet of isolation, but the real home for the seeker is among God's

people in the Lord's house. God delights to dwell, not only in the human spirit but *among* believers as they worship, learn, support each other in prayer and seek God together as a holy family. Jesus did not come to grant isolated souls inner peace. He came to build a Church with a desire to live *among* that family!

There are certain high Church traditions which greatly honor sacred space, but some, especially those from a lower Church tradition, may mock the overly adorned and carefully guarded sanctuary. What is amusing is when these same critics, who may refer to their worship space as simply the meeting hall or the auditorium and play down the notion of sacred space, find children running and playing in that meeting hall they scold them extra firmly with the words, "Stop running children! Don't you know where you are?" High Church folks may get carried away in their honoring of sacred space, and low Church folks may be partially blind to the importance of holy areas. We may not all agree on exactly what is meant by sacred space, but all must admit that wherever God's people gather is special!

Dr. Barna has done more than gather opinions. He has stumbled upon a holy truth. When the seeking soul cries out, *Where can I go and meet with God?* we do have an answer. At the risk of sounding a bit simplistic, we can suggest that going to Church is a great start.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

Lord of the Church, enable your people to be the Church—a redeemed people, a holy people, a united people, a missionary people, and in all things a people gladly sub-missive to the truth you have shown us in yourself, Jesus Christ our Lord. —Michael Seward