

**THE ENGAGING CHURCH:  
(4) ENGAGED IN WORSHIP**

Mark 12:30  
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**PROLOGUE**

I do not usually care for morbid evangelistic humor but I must confess I chuckled when I came across this ditty based on Hebrews 9:27:

I wish you folks would come to church,  
If only for a visit.  
For someday they will carry you in,  
And the Lord will say, "Who is it?"

**SCRIPTURE**

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30 NRSV).

**INTRODUCTION**

The mission of the Church is to engage in what God is doing in the world. We cannot do this without engaging in worship. Frank L. Accardy has written:

"A rowboat in the sand is hard to move. But when the tide comes in, it is easy. The church is like that. When genuine worship is absent from the church she struggles to do her work, but when a tide of praise uplifts her heart, everything goes better."

**1. WE WILL ENGAGE OUR HEARTS IN WORSHIP**

**IF WE WANT TO BE AN ENGAGING CHURCH WE WILL ENGAGE OUR HEARTS IN WORSHIP.**

The Scripture says:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul"  
(30a).

God wants us to love him passionately, that is, with heart and soul. This has often been difficult for Presbyterian Christians to do. The late Frank Reynolds (ABC news anchor) once reported that in the Presbyterian Church, "the worship is so cold you can skate down the aisles." That was not exactly a glowing recommendation!

Our ecclesiastical standards tell us that worship is to be marked by both ardor and order. Ardor is another word for "passion." We tend to be almost fanatical when it comes to order and rather anaemic on passion.

Bruce Larson tells about a conference at a Presbyterian church in Omaha. People were given helium filled balloons and told to release them at some point in the service when they felt like expressing the joy in their hearts. Since they were Presbyterians, they felt intimidated by this, so much so that at the end of the service many were still clutching their balloons.

Is there any hope for those of us who are sometimes known as the "frozen chosen?" The answer is a resounding YES! In Exodus we read:

"He is a God who is passionate about his relationship with you" (Exodus 34:14b NLT).

The solution to our problem does not lie in us trying harder to be passionate about God but simply to appreciate how passionate God is about us! He loved us long before we ever loved him. The Bible says:

“This is the kind of love we are talking about—not that we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they've done to our relationship with God” (1 John 4:10 MESSAGE).

There was a popular story in Jesus' day called “The Story of the Lost Coin.” Rabbis told and retold this story. The disciples of Jesus would have been familiar with this story. One day Jesus told this story but with some changes (Luke 15:8-10). In the original story the person searching for the coin represented someone searching after God, someone who was trying to earn God's favor. But in Jesus' version, the person searching for the coin does not represent someone seeking God but God looking for us! It is hard for us to imagine but in those days such an idea was inconceivable. A great Jewish scholar has said that this is the one absolutely new thing which Jesus taught about God--that God searches for us.

God's love is a welcoming, accepting love. He searches after us to win our hearts to his. Worship is our response to his winsome love.

In the Psalms we are told to “Kiss the Lord” (Psalm 2: 12). The word for “kiss” (*nashaq*, pronounced naw-shak') is used as a figure of speech that means to worship in a personal and intimate way. I find it interesting that the most common term for worship in the New Testament (*proskuneo*, pros-koo-neh'-o) means the same thing, that is, “to kiss.” So both Testaments bid us to worship in a personal way using this intimate metaphor of kissing God. Worship is not intended to be a religious exercise but a relational experience with the living Lord.

But too often we are like the country boy at the conclusion of his first date. Standing under the porch light of the girl's front door, the boy looked at her and said, "May I kiss you?" The girl smiled and said nothing. The boy tried again. "May I kiss you?" Again the girl smiled and said nothing. "Are you deaf?" asked the boy. "Are you paralyzed?" asked the girl.

Are you paralyzed when it comes to showing your affection for God? What would it take to move you into a deeper, more intimate relationship with God? Do you realize that if you are a Christian, then you have been bought with a price? The Son of God has laid down his life for you, an innocent man shed his blood for you. You have been rescued from the dominion of darkness, forgiven of all your sins, reconciled to God your Creator, sealed with the Holy Spirit, made co-heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ and given eternal life all for free! Let go of your balloon! Worship God with all your heart.

## **2. WE WILL ENGAGE OUR MINDS IN WORSHIP**

**IF WE WANT TO BE AN ENGAGING CHURCH WE WILL ENGAGE OUR MINDS IN WORSHIP.**

The Scripture says:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your ...mind” (30b).

We need to think about worship. How important is worship? Leonard Sweet says that if you want to know how important worship is, ask the devil. When the devil tested Jesus in the wilderness he saved his greatest temptation for last:

“Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, ‘All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me’” (Matt 4:8-9 NRSV).

Notice, the devil did not offer half the kingdoms of the world. Nor did he say, “You can have most of them but I want to keep Las Vegas.” He offered them all in exchange for what? Worship! Do you want to know how important worship is? Its worth to the devil is all the kingdoms of the world. Given a choice between power and worship, the devil chooses worship. How important is worship to you?

The devil can teach us the importance of worship. But Jesus teaches us to *whom* we are to give our worship. He replied to the devil:

"Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him'" (Matt 4:10 NRSV).

The word “worship” comes from *worship* and it means to attribute worth to something or someone (from the Old English *weorthscipe*, *worth* + *ship*). Worship is a declaration of worth. Christian worship is a declaration of the surpassing worth of God as revealed to us in Jesus Christ. In the Revelation to John we read:

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created" (Rev 4:11 NRSV).

God is worthy of our devotion, our obedience, and especially our love.

We need to think about the importance of worship. We also need to think about power in worship. From time-to-time I will hear someone comment after a service, “That sure was a powerful worship today!” Or they may comment on a particular part of the service and say “That was a powerful hymn we sang” or “That was a powerful anthem” or (less frequently) “That was a powerful sermon.” If this is just a figure of speech then there is no problem. But if it is meant literally then we are in trouble. For the power in worship is not the service, but God.

There is no power in the style of worship. There is no power in the setting for worship. There is no power in the music for worship. There is no power in any person or team involved in leading worship. Nothing and no one but God either possesses or empowers worship. Nothing celebrates God that did not come from God in the first place. It does not matter how excited people get or how many thousands flock to attend, if God himself is not the resource, the focus, and the power of what happens then true worship does not take place.

When it comes to worship, we also need to distinguish between form and function. Function refers to what you are trying to accomplish and form refers to the means for accomplishing it. A style of worship would be a form of worship. The New Testament does not teach a fixed style of worship. Instead, we have biblical principles for worship that we need to think about and apply to our particular setting. We are free to follow a wide variety of forms provided we continue to follow the principles. But too often we do things in worship without thinking about them and because that's the way we've always done it.

One of my favorite stories has to do with cooking a ham for Easter. It was Easter and four generations had gathered for a family dinner. The youngest girl saw her mother slice off two inches from the end of the ham and then place it in the oven. She asked, "Mom, why did you slice off the end of the ham before putting it in the oven?" Her mother replied, "I never really thought about it before. I guess it is because my mother always did it." The little girl went to her grandmother and asked, "Grandma, how come you always used to slice off the end of the ham for Easter dinner?" The grandmother replied, "Because my mother always did it that

way." The little girl went to her great-grandmother and asked, "Great Grandma, how come you always used to slice off the end of the ham for Easter dinner?" "Oh, dear," replied the great-grandmother, "that's because my pan was too small."

Worship involves communication with God and each other. Therefore, forms of worship reflect the way our particular culture communicates. As culture changes, the meaning of a particular form of worship can change dramatically, and therein lies the danger. Let me give you two examples.

In 1611, when the King James Version of the Bible was published, there were two different personal pronouns used to address someone: "thou" and "you." One was used in formal situations such as addressing royalty and the other was used in intimate situations such as when you spoke to your Mom or Dad or a close friend. Can you guess which was which? It may not be what you think.

The word "thou" was used to address someone intimately and "you" was used in courtly address. Today, the use of "thou" to refer to God seems cold and formal to most people, which is the exact opposite of what was intended. The form has been kept but the function has been lost.

When the translators of the King James Version of the Bible decided on using "thou" to refer to God, they were putting a principle or function ahead of form. Specifically, they wanted to make the important and biblically supported statement that God is not some remote and inaccessible deity but that God is "like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child, like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home" (*Brief Statement of Faith*, PCUSA). They were trying to say that biblical worship is about relating deeply and affectionately to a loving God.

Historically, Presbyterian ministers have worn a black robe in worship. Why? Some would say because it identifies the person wearing the robe as being a member of the ordained clergy. Others would say it stems from a time when church buildings were drafty and robes were a practical way to keep warm. And at least one Presbyterian minister I know wears a robe because then he does not have to worry about his wardrobe, which is atrocious at the best of times.

But the real reason so many Protestant ministers wear robes in worship is due to the influence of the Swiss reformer John Calvin. John Calvin wore a black robe in worship because his father did before him, his grandfather before his father and his great grandfather before that – Just kidding! Calvin was not an ordained clergyman so the robe did not represent ordination. He wore street clothes and often donned a black robe for worship because, in his day, teachers wore black robes. (We see a remnant of this today in academic settings. For example, most professors will wear a robe at Commencement.) More than anything else, Calvin wanted to stress that the role of the pastor is to be a teacher of the Word. The New Testament connects the office of pastor with the function of teacher (Eph 4:11). A pastor is a "teaching elder." (See 1 Tim 5:17).

These two examples underscore the need to think about what we do in worship and why. If we want to be an Engaging Church we need to engage our minds in worship. We need to think about the biblical principles for worship and consider what forms would best communicate their meaning today.

### **3. WE WILL ENGAGE OUR HANDS AND FEET IN WORSHIP**

**IF WE WANT TO BE AN ENGAGING CHURCH WE WILL ENGAGE OUR HANDS AND FEET IN WORSHIP.**

The Scripture says:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your ...strength” (30c).

Worship can be expressed through physical actions: bowing down, kneeling, raising and clapping hands, to name a few. Yes, I did say clapping. When the Israelites sang...

“Clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph”  
(Psalm 47:1 KJV).

...they did not do it with their hands in their pockets!

Now this may come as a shock to some of you, but Queen Elizabeth I of England is said to have derisively called Presbyterian worship songs “Genevan jigs,” because when you heard them you felt like dancing and she thought that was inappropriate for worship.

But the Bible speaks favorably of dancing in worship:

“Praise his name by dancing and playing music on harps and tambourines” (Psalm 149:3 CEV).

Many forms of dance can be used to give praise to God. Perhaps you have seen what is called Christian Sacred Dance. This involves one or more persons trained in using interpretive movement within a service. I like the way Westminster Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor expresses the purpose of their Sacred Dance ministry: “Faithfully proclaiming the Word of God through symbolic and interpretive movement, leading believers and seekers in praise and worship of the Living Word, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.”

Sacred dance was employed in this congregation in the not too distant past and was well received. There are a number of people, including myself, who would like to see its return. Let me know if you have an interest. After all, each of us has a part to play in worship. Paul says:

"To sum up, my friends, when you meet for worship, each of you contributes..."  
(1 cor 14:26 NEB).

Worship is meant to be a participatory experience. Each of us has a part to play. The congregation is not the audience. The choir/praise team never performs musical numbers for you.<sup>1</sup> Rather they represent in particular ways what is meant to be true always - God is worthy of our highest praise.

The role of audience is reserved for God alone. But he is not at all like the typical audience. He loves to participate with us. He is enthroned on the praises of his people (Psalm 22:3).

## **CONCLUSION**

God is worthy of our worship. So let us give God our affection, our attention and our abilities. Let us love God passionately, thoughtfully and practically. We were created for God's pleasure. Let us make it our goal to please God (2 Cor 5:9).

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<sup>1</sup>Ironically, choirs in the Presbyterian Church are almost as new as praise teams. Traditional Presbyterian worship did not have choirs or use organs. Second Presbyterian Church of Charleston, South Carolina, went through a major controversy over the introduction of a choir and instruments. Some conservatives even padlocked the cello in order to prevent it from being used! The congregation finally got an organ in 1856. There are still Presbyterian and Reformed Churches who, to this day, do not use choirs or instruments.