

Reflective Worship – 7th June - Songs and Meditation

God it was who said to Abraham,
“Pack your bags and travel on.”
God it was who said to Sarah,
“Smile, and soon you’ll bear a son.”
Travelling folk and aged mothers
wandering when they’d thought they’d done.
This is how we find God’s people,
losing all because of One.

God it was who said to Moses,
“Save my people, part the sea!”
God it was who said to Miriam,
“Sing and dance to show you’re free.”
Shepherd saints and tambourinists
doing what God knew they could.
This is how we find God’s people,
liberating what they should.

God it was who said to Joseph,
“Down your tools and take your wife.”
God it was who said to Mary,
“In your womb I’ll start my life.”
Carpenter and country maiden
leaving town and trade and skills.
This is how we find God’s people,
Moved by what their Maker wills.

In this crowd which spans the ages,
With these saints whom we revere,
God wants us to share their purpose,
starting now and starting here.
So we celebrate our calling,
so we raise both heart and voice,
as we pray that through our living
All may find they are God’s choice.

*Come Holy Ghost, soon we should be sleeping.
Gladden every heart entrusted to your keeping.*

Now the day is done,
thanks for all it brought us,
for what we met or missed,
and how that touched or taught us.

*Come Holy Ghost, soon we should be sleeping.
Gladden every heart entrusted to your keeping.*

Bless the ones we love,
bless the ones we weary,
and bless the ones whose lives
are empty, done or dreary.

*Come Holy Ghost, soon we should be sleeping.
Gladden every heart entrusted to your keeping.*

Let our bodies rest,
free our minds for dreaming
and shed the light of Christ,
to set our spirits gleaming.

*Come Holy Ghost, soon we should be sleeping.
Gladden every heart entrusted to your keeping.*

Words John Bell and Graham Maule
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Meditation - Worship (Kate Day)

Exodus 20: 1-5a

Then God spoke all these words:

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them

Exodus 32: 1b- 6a

The people gathered around Aaron and said to him, 'Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' Aaron said to them, 'Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.' So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. He took the gold from them, formed it in a mould, and cast an image of a calf; and they said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!' When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it..... They rose early the next day, and offered burnt-offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being....

As we've been thinking this week about how we move forward as "Church in the time of Coronavirus", I've been doing some musing on Worship, and what it might mean in this strange new world that we are currently inhabiting.

I suspect that 6 months ago, if someone was talking about "worship" we would have had a pretty clear idea of what they meant – gathering together in a recognised place at a recognised time, to sing and pray, to read the Bible and listen (or not) to a sermon. For some of us, it might also have meant time sharing tea or coffee with people with whom we have something in common; for some of us it might have been associated with a particular role, whether that was preparing the building, leading prayers, or providing the biscuits.

Well “it’s all a bit different now”, is all I will say. Yet, here we are still, gathered remotely under the heading of reflective worship. Maybe a good time to reflect on what “worship” is really all about.

But what might we even mean when we use the word “worship”? Human beings seem to have an innate drive to worship, to hold up someone, or something, as the focus for who we are and how we live our life. Worshipping in some form or another is present in pretty much all societies. The question is not so much “do we worship?” as “what, or who, do we worship?” We are very familiar with many contemporary “idols” prevalent in culture today – the cult of celebrity, the markets, personal ambition, possessions, rationality, the human intellect. They are very insidious. Maybe it doesn’t hurt to do the occasional self-check to see which of them are encroaching on our worship of God.

The striking thing about most idols is that they are inanimate, lifeless, unreal even; worship of them is essentially a one-way street.

Whereas our worship is inspired by our two-way relationship with the living God. At its heart, Christian worship is the expression and outworking of our love for God.

It is, or should be, our response to the God who loves us and holds us, the God who is the source of our being. Our response to his love for us.

And what might this response properly look like? Everything we have comes from God already - as Psalm 24 says, “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it; the world and all who live in it.”

All we can offer is our selves, our whole selves, back to God; to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength”, as Jesus says in Mark 12:30 and Luke 10:27.

To put God first and centre in our lives.

In the OT, worship was based around sacrifices. It’s easy to think of these as offerings to placate an angry God - and there certainly were sin offerings. But more importantly, the sacrificial system was intended to be a practical demonstration by the Israelites that God was first and centre in their lives – more important than the flocks and herds, and the wealth that they represented.

Romans 12 picks up this idea of sacrifice and puts it like this.....

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Christian worship is offering, “sacrificing”, our whole self, our whole life – not just what happens at a church service.

It is the expression and outworking of our love for God.

So we have thought about how we all worship something or someone. The question is what, or who?

And about how the heart of worship is relationship with God. Putting God first and centre in our lives. The expression and outworking of our love for God.

The “outworkings” are so important we will be looking at these in the next three Reflective Worship services, when we will be thinking about how we care for others, how we act against injustice, and how we grow.

For now, let’s think about worship as the expression of our love for God. What might we be doing by gathering physically or remotely for a “worship service”?

Maybe we are setting aside time to consciously focus on our relationship with God, and to reiterate our intention to put God first and centre in our lives.

- Time for us to remember who God is - to acknowledge the awe and majesty of God (Father) in praise and thanksgiving, and to recognise our own failures to live in his way
- Time to remind ourselves what God has done – to remember his compassion and self-giving, especially shown through Jesus; to recall the window Jesus gives into the just and merciful heart of God and the door he opens into relationship
- Time to be aware of what God is still doing – doing today, in and through the lives of people like us. To encounter the living presence of the Spirit, reassuring, inspiring and equipping us to do God’s work in God’s world.

And it seems to me that the persons of the Trinity are the basis for the major different ways in which Christians choose or prefer to worship.

The awe and majesty of the Father, Creator God – reigning in power and might, mystery and majesty; worthy of deep reverence and praise, and maybe quite remote. We might say this is reflected in Cathedral or in very formal or traditional worship, with its stunning architecture, use of colour and movement, and complex choral music. Worship which engages the worshipper in a physical and sensory way.

The person and work of Jesus, emphasising personal relationship and conduct, with a focus on the written word, on announcing or “speaking out” the Good News – the Greek roots of the term “evangelical”. On truth and on understanding with the mind.

The presence and power of the Spirit – comforting, assuring, healing, giving gifts (hence the term charismatic, Greek for gift) and inspiring action. Bringing comfort and challenge, appealing to the heart.

Here’s the important thing – most likely we will all have a preference for one of these. Or maybe two. And that is not surprising. We are all different. It’s fine.

However, with the caveat that it can be argued that each of these styles of worship has its lunatic fringe, what we should not be doing is either writing off other people’s preferences, or of declining to ever experience them. Or, worst of all, assuming that God could never speak to us (or indeed anyone) through a worship style that doesn’t appeal to “me”. Speaking personally, a couple of my most treasured experiences of God have occurred during a worship service which was totally not my preferred style.

And perhaps Celtic style Reflective Worship on Trinity Sunday is a good time to offer the opinion that the Celtic tradition of celebrating not just Father, Son and Spirit individually, but also as the One-in-Three and Three-in-One, leads to a style of worship which includes a healthy and inspiring balance of all three styles. Maybe if charismatic worship is “heart”, cathedral or “high church” is strength, and evangelical is “mind”, then Celtic worship is the one which nourishes the “soul”.

So where has this taken us?

We all worship something or someone. The question is what, or who? The heart of worship is relationship with God. Putting God first and centre in our lives. The expression and outworking of our love for God. Arguably, different styles of worship reflect God as Father, Son, Spirit and Trinity; and we will also have preferences based on our personalities. Whilst this is fine, it's also important remember that God can speak to us in the most unexpected of places, and to be willing to not just try other styles, but to respect that they are important for others.

And before we move on in the service, let's just take a little moment to think about different styles of worship, and our approaches to them. You might like to think about these questions:

Have you had experience of different styles of worship? Is God present in all of them? What have we learnt about different ways of worshipping God as a result of the lockdown?