

## CONFIRMATION – MONTHLY MEETING

Sunday, December 13, 2009

Session 4 – Notes

### Why worship?

The only way to answer this question is to ask similar questions:

- Why eat?
- Why drink water?
- Why sleep?

The obvious answer is because we need to. We can't not eat, drink or sleep. We can eat, drink or sleep less, but we need these things to sustain life. Although many people fail to recognize it, worship is just as necessary for the person of faith. We only delude ourselves into thinking that worship is an optional activity.

Actually, worship is less an activity and more an availability. When we eat we make our bodies available to receive food. When we worship we make the completeness of our beings ready to receive God. We worship God, not because God needs us to, but because we need to. Why do you stay on the phone or on-line for long stretches with your friends? Because the connections you share are so strong that something is missing if you don't connect. This is a very mediocre comparison of how our spirits need to connect with God.

Worship has two primary forms:

- Private worship
- Community worship

Both are important. We need time alone with God but we also need to be with other people who are worshipping God. The Christian faith is a community faith more than it is an individual faith. Therefore the Christian life cannot be lived fully apart from the community, the community in all its diversity of expression, experience and excitement.

### What if worship is boring?

It will be boring sometimes but that's not because God is boring. We have to look first at how we prepare for worship. How do we prepare to eat? Is our dining experience simply stuffing boring, bland food into our mouths, or do we select our favorite foods, season them with care and use the nicest dishes and glassware? This may be an inadequate example because in our current American culture the dining experience has been limited far too often to a quick burger on the run. On the other

hand, people in love often go out to a nice restaurant as an act of deep intimacy. They choose the timing, the setting and what they will wear just as carefully as they choose from the menu. Sometimes a meal is a burger, sometimes it is a banquet. It all has to do with the planning and preparation. And, it also has to do with the amount of joy around the table.

Worship can be burger-like. It can be slapped together with little anticipation of intimacy with God. That kind of worship can really be boring.

Sometimes we confuse boredom with not knowing all the things going on in worship. God meets us in worship and God is always ready for us. Sometimes when we come to worship we are simply not ready to meet God. It's like showing up to a wonderful restaurant and not knowing how to use the fork or how to enjoy dessert.

There are many ways to worship God, and some will appeal to us more than others. But the essence of worship is the same. God and people come together to enjoy being together. God comes to touch our lives with hope, joy, peace and love. We come to be reminded just how wonderful it is to be loved by such a God.

### Seasons, colors, meanings

#### ADVENT

- Duration – 4 Sundays before Christmas
- Color – blue or purple
- Theme – preparation for the coming of Christ into the world
- Other symbols – Advent wreath, trumpets, scales of justice
- History – “A council in Spain in 380 CE decreed that ‘from December 17 until the day of Epiphany which is January 6 no one is permitted to be absent from Church.’ This precedent for Advent dates from when Christmas, itself, was as yet unknown in Spain. By the 5<sup>th</sup> century, a forty-day season of preparation for the Epiphany was being practiced in Gaul (this paralleled Lent and began about when Advent now begins). Rome eventually adopted a four-week Advent before Christmas.”  
*Seasons of the Gospel, Abingdon, 1979, p. 23.*

#### CHRISTMAS

- Duration – 12 days starting from Christmas Day
- Color – white, also yellow or gold
- Theme – the coming of Christ into the world
- Other symbols – manger, angels, shepherds

- History – “Epiphany underwent a split in the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, probably beginning in Rome. Our earliest mention of the new feast, Christmas, occurs in a document from 354 CE, which reflects usage of about 336 CE. It lists December 25 as *natus Christus in Betleem Iudeae*. Apparently this date was chosen to replace a pagan festival of the unconquered sun as the sun begins to wax again at the winter solstice. Gradually, the new festival of Christmas took over part of the commemorations of the Epiphany. Chrysostom told a congregation in Antioch on Christmas Day, 386 CE: ‘This day has now been brought to us, not many years ago, has developed so quickly and borne such fruit.’” *Seasons of the Gospel*, Abingdon, 1979, p. 22.

## EPIPHANY

- Duration – from and including January 6 through the Tuesday prior to Ash Wednesday
- Color – green, except that white is used on the first and last Sundays after the Epiphany (the Baptism of the Lord and the Transfiguration of the Lord)
- Theme – the manifestation of God is Jesus Christ
- Other symbols – star, wise men, baptismal shell, lamp
- History – “The third chief event in the calendar of the early church was the Epiphany. Its origins are more obscure; they were certainly not Jewish but probably were Egyptian. The date, January 6, took the place of a pagan feast at the Egyptian winter solstice. The Epiphany signified several things, all of which had to do with the beginnings of Jesus Christ’s work of manifesting God. This feast referred to the birth of Christ (with which two Gospels begin), to the baptism of Jesus (with which the other Gospels begin), and to the first miracle of which John’s Gospel says: ‘This deed at Cana-in-Galilee is the first of the signs by which Jesus revealed his glory and led his disciples to believe in him.’ The common theme of all these events is Jesus Christ manifesting God to humans. The Epiphany, then, is older than Christmas and has a deeper meaning.” *Seasons of the Gospel*, Abingdon, p. 21-22.

## LENT

- Duration – 40 days, beginning with Ash Wednesday and ending with the Saturday before Easter.
- Color – purple

- Theme – Jesus’ willingness to stay true to his mission, including his suffering and death on the cross
- Other symbols – cross, thorns, nails, bag of coins
- History – “In the earliest church, Christ’s passion, death and resurrection were commemorated together at the Pascha (the Jewish feast of unleavened bread). The ancient unitive Pascha had (later) been broken into separate commemorations. Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter vigil (between Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday), plus Palm/Passion Sunday and the three lesser days of Holy Week. Lent began as a period of preparation for those who had been set apart after considerable preparation as catechumens before being baptized at the Easter Vigil. The Council of Nicaea, 325 CE, first referred to Lent as “forty days.” About 348 CE, Bishop Cyril of Jerusalem told those about to be baptized, ‘You have a long period of grace, forty days for repentance.’ By Augustine’s time Lent had become a time of preparation for all Christians, baptized or not, in that ‘part of the year . . . adjoining . . . and touching on the Lord’s passion.’” *Seasons of the Gospel*, Abingdon, 1979, p. 18–20.

## EASTER

- Duration – 7 weeks, including the Day of Pentecost
- Color – white, gold or yellow
- Theme – the resurrection of Christ
- Other symbols – the phoenix, butterflies, lilies, peacocks
- History – “Scripture itself was mined for evidence as to time and place of all the events of Christ’s last week in Jerusalem. We have a good example of what had developed by about 384 CE as chronicled in the writings of a Spanish woman named Egeria. Her notes have survived and give us a clear insight as to how late 4<sup>th</sup> century Jerusalem had developed its way of keeping time. These developments in Jerusalem have shaped Christian practices ever since. The English term ‘Easter’ comes from the Old English ‘Eastre,’ a pagan spring festival; romance languages use forms of ‘Pascha.’ [The Easter Season is] 50 days extending the celebration of Easter through the Day of Pentecost. Easter then, was a day of the week, a day of the year, and a season. There can be no doubt as to the centrality of the Resurrection in the life and faith of the early church.” *Seasons of the Gospel*, Abingdon, 1979, p. 19–20.

## PENTECOST

- Duration – from the day after the Day of Pentecost through the day before the first Sunday of Advent
- Color – red for the Day of Pentecost and green for the season of Pentecost
- Theme – the sending of the Holy Spirit, the ministry of the church
- History – “Second in importance [to Easter] was the celebration of another event, the Day of Pentecost. Like the Pascha, it was also a Jewish feast. Sometimes during the first century, the Day of Pentecost came to reflect for Jews the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai. Paul contrasts this with the giving of the Spirit. For Christians, that Day of Pentecost commemorated the birthday of the church when, with the noise of a wind, tongues of flame rested on the disciples, and they began to talk in other tongues to be understood. For almost 4 centuries, the Day of Pentecost commemorated both the ascension of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit. By the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, these two commemorations had been separated. Where there had been one feast, but the late 4<sup>th</sup> century there were two: Ascension and Pentecost. Christ was in heaven, and the Holy Spirit dwelt in the holy church on earth. It was a daily reality the church could experience, not an abstraction.” *Seasons of the Gospel*, Abingdon, 1979, p. 20-21.

## Prayer

What it is:

- Openness
- Wonder
- Intimacy with God
- Preparation
- Giving and receiving
- Listening
- Communication in the broadest sense of that word
- Acknowledgment of someone else in the presence of God
- Acknowledgment of self in the presence of God
- Silence

What it is not:

- Performance
- Formula
- Cause and effect

- Obligation

## Healing

All healing is of God. The church's healing ministry in no way detracts from the gifts God gives through medicine and psychotherapy. It is no substitute for either medicine or the proper care of one's health. Rather, it adds to our total resources for wholeness.

Healing is not magic, but underlying it is the great mystery of God's love. Those who minister spiritual healing are channels of God's love. Although no one can predict what will happen in a given instance, many marvelous healings have taken place.

God does not promise that we shall be spared suffering but does promise to be with us in our suffering. Trusting that promise, we are enabled to recognize God's sustaining presence in pain, sickness, injury and estrangement.

Likewise, God does not promise that we will be cured of all illnesses; and we all must face the inevitability of death. A Service of Healing and Meditation is not necessarily a service of curing, but it provides an atmosphere in which healing can happen. The greatest healing of all is the reunion or reconciliation of a human being with God. When this happens, physical healing sometimes occurs, mental and emotional balance is often restored, spiritual health is enhanced and relationships are healed. For the Christian the basic purpose of spiritual healing is to renew and strengthen one's relationship with the living Christ.

## The Sacraments

A sacrament is something very ordinary and central to human life that helps to convey that which is extraordinary and deeply spiritual. In that sense, almost everything in life has the potential of being sacramental. The church has set aside certain experiences as sacraments. The Catholic Church has seven; the United Methodist Church has two.

- Baptism – Water is absolutely necessary to sustain life. Additionally we use it to wash ourselves. For the Christian, baptism helps us touch and be touched by the Christ Spirit. We "drink in" God's inclusion and belonging, and we are "washed" and restored to wholeness and community.
- Communion – Bread and wine are considered to be essential staples of early societies and cultures. The broken loaf reminds us of Jesus who was

committed to God's hope and justice. The cup reminds us of God's presence and blessing anytime people put others ahead of their own interests.