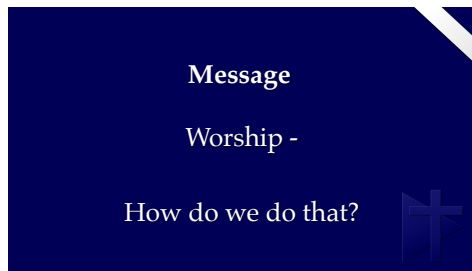


So How Do We Worship, And How Do We Do That Together?

Following: Those Magi Guys And Our Worship.

Epiphany 2019



Introduction:

Two weeks ago on Epiphany Sunday I looked at the Magi as model worshippers. The text and audio are available on the church website.

Today's message builds on that and is practical application for us here as Trinity Church.

I'll first recap the foundation I laid earlier before diving into looking at how we may worship and then how we do that together.

Re-Cap On Worship:

Israel's Big Lessons:

1. Who is the true God - YHWH the LORD?
2. How do we worship him rightly?

Through-out what we call the 'Old Testament' the called out People of God had been learning two fundamental lessons:

- A. Who the one true God is? ¹
- B. How do we worship this one true God?

These issues informed 2 points of consideration concerning worship.

- 1) Worship is determined by the 'object' of worship.
We worship according to who it is we worship.

We considered the Anglo-Saxon word 'worship' which simply means giving what the other is worth. ²

The One Holy God is worthy of holy worship. This implies that appropriate worship is not essentially determined by what the worshippers desire. Worship is what arises and flows from the worshipper in response to the recognized worth of the one worshipped.

- 2) Secondly, the Holy God of Israel made it clear time and again that worship needed to be personally authentic or genuine.

Worship is personal not technical. "We are the worship." Worship is not primarily about getting it right to some formula or something achieved through

2 Key Points on Worship:

1. It's all about the worth of the One.
2. It's personal.

¹ Today in the East that question still lives while in the West the question has become whether God actually exists?

² I am not aware of other European languages stressing this insight.

correct words or ritual.³ It's about offering ourselves as the offering.

The passage where this is prophetically communicated in unforgettable terms is Amos 5.21ff where YHWH says to his people in a time when worship was popular:

- ²¹ "I hate, I despise your feasts,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
²² Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them;
and the peace offerings of your fattened animals,
I will not look upon them.
²³ Take away from me the noise of your songs;
to the melody of your harps I will not listen.
²⁴ But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

The Holy God of Israel wanted right, true, authentic lives offered as an unending stream of worship.

So again the music, the liturgy, the financial offerings, all we may bring are not the essence of worship. What Amos declares is that God seeks the fruit of holy lives in righteous and just living. Music and colourful festivals are like icing on the cake, a sweet expression but not the substance.



Worship via Music

To sort out our language on this I took up a phrase suggested by Kate van Zwol that sets it out well: 'Worship via Music'. The music is a means to an end. The end is holy worship.

So For Today, What Is Worship For The Worshipper?

If worship is determined by the one being given their worth, and presenting ourselves as an offering, how do you do that?

Here are some insights from ancient Christian art relating to how the first Christians presented themselves in worship.⁴

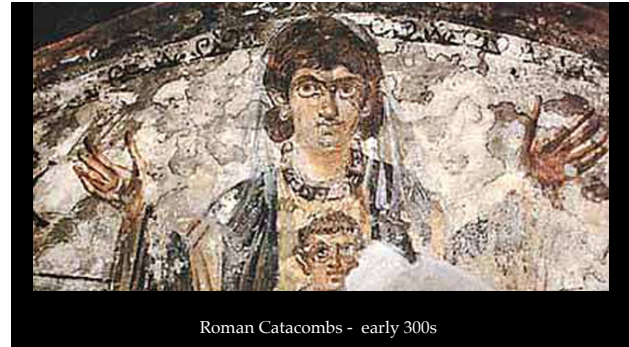
- What do you notice?
- What does the body language suggest about the person?

³ As the medieval church claimed with '*ex opere operato*' where a properly ordained priest saying the official liturgy could not get it wrong – so long as the formula was complied with, God would smile and grace would flow.

⁴ <http://www.wikiwand.com/en/Orans>



Worship involves lifting holy hands to God - hands raised openly representing the wholeness of all we do.



This is a stance of prayer known as 'Orans' which simply means prayer. It was known and used before Judaism and Christianity so not a Christian invention.

This was apparently the standard position of prayer until the 12th century when the closed hands became standard apart from a few priestly gestures in the Eastern and Roman Churches.

- Q:** Does anyone know what inspired the closed hands as posture for prayer?
A: Clasped hands are the pose of a slave's submission to their king.

In the 20th Century the Neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic movements brought orans back into common use.

The reason I focus on this is because what it models being spiritually open and present which I think is one core dimension of spiritual worship as God seeks it. This is about more than saying right words or singing well. This is more about spiritual presence and open availability to God for him and his glory. It is about seeking a real, actual connection with God through spiritual communion.

It is about our deep calling to God's deep and vice-versa, knowing each other's presence and heart.

A body posture in itself is not something God responds to. If the Holy Spirit responded more to one stance than another we would focus on that - right?

What I have found is that worshipping with the body language of openness and peace helps me hold that stance spiritually. Engaging my body this way is a help to me in being spiritually open and active in worship.



The picture above shows a mildly closed body stance. Folded arms and clenched fists are more extreme expressions of this. I suggest that standing like that before God expresses a closed if not conflicted spirit.

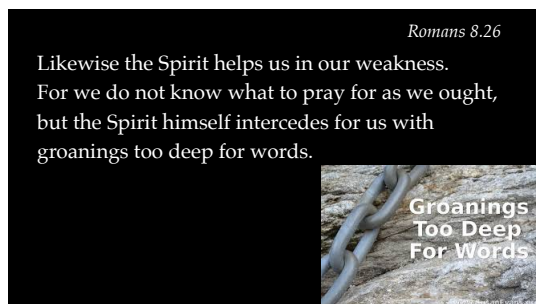
So to be clear, my message is that **worship involves spiritual openness and how we bring our bodies to worship may help or hinder that.**

For me the key spiritual process in worship and personal prayer is lifting up the core of who we are to God, call it 'heart' or 'soul' but is where we really live and who we really are.

Worship of God involves an exclusive offering of our inner being to God and God alone. It's inherently intimate. For me that involves lining up my body, my mind and my heart in offering and receiving.

This is the expression of our deep calling to God's deep at the enormity of who God is and his love for us in Jesus Christ.⁵ At the same time we may sense God calling to our deep

Beyond practicing spiritual openness and availability we still need God's help, we need his Holy Spirit to help us worship and do anything of spiritual value. A verse I cling to is Romans 8.26



Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

St. Paul knew it: Left to ourselves we do not know what to prayer for or how to pray! He also knew the grace of God available to the aspiring worshipper and person of prayer. The Holy Spirit participates in that drama of 'deep calling to deep' in all circumstances.

Whatever there may be in your dark basement, those who are open to the Holy Spirit may know the Holy Spirit interceding through them inspiring and releasing prayers that go from where we are to the heart of God.

⁵ Psalm 42.7 - Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me.

The Holy Spirit lifts those who wait upon him as on eagle's wings to the very presence of God. That is the grace available to those who come to worship openly in spirit and truth.

It can be a profoundly humbling experience. Paul describes the experience of the Holy Spirit working through us in intercessory prayer as 'groanings too deep for words'.

Some people think 'groanings' refers to the gift of tongues. It might well be so, but I also hear something raw in that word. I hear the sounds of the deepest places that cannot find expression beyond cries of the heart. They often come with tears as the Holy Spirit empowers us to pray and be present to God beyond our own capacity. Then in that place of kingdom presence God's ministers.

Spiritual openness and reaching for God with the active help of the Holy Spirit leads and empowers us in worship into God's presence.

So that's a brief look at the how of worship. This is how it is for me.

Corporate Worship – Worshipping Together

The last question I want to raise is how do we do this together?

Q: How do we come together into the presence of God, each of us in spirit and truth yet corporately as a joint offering in worship?

Worshipping in your own home -your own space- may be quiet but it's simple.
Worshipping within a congregation is bigger but not so simple.

I want to suggest it requires what I call 'bi-focal awareness'.



'Bi-focal awareness' is easy for some people and not for others. It simply means keeping more than one dynamic process in view.

I learned this playing clarinet in an orchestra where I had to read the sheet music in front of me while also taking direction from the conductor by looking over the top of the music stand to see them.

This brings us to our relationship to the person leading the congregation in worship at any time. We might call that person the 'worship leader'.

Worship leaders need very good bi-focal awareness to help a congregation into worship as I have described it. They need to be aware of the Holy Spirit helping and guiding and they need to be aware of where the congregation is in relation to that. There is a lot going on!

Remember, congregational worship is not simply 100 people singing the same pious words together in karaoke format on Sunday morning!

Congregational worship is about people flowing together as a joint offering to God and knowing his presence together as the Holy Spirit empowers them. Taking people there is the ministry of the worship leader.

The first part of this work is gathering. We come as individuals with all sorts of things buzzing in our heads. It takes a few steps to move from there to being a congregation in worship. Jan Waterschoot does this on first Sundays with the Gathering and Preparation Liturgy. We do this in All Age services. I did that today. Our worship-via-music leaders Oliver and Heidi do this with scripture or words of invitation. Pamela and Kate do this as well for more traditional hymns and songs.

What I am aware of is that we do not all relate to this in the same way. I wonder if some of us are from various forms of mono-focal church backgrounds.

Let me illustrate:

In the 1990s a tunnel was bored between mainland Europe and the southern coast of England. We know it today as ‘The Chunnel’. Before the new tunnel could be used safety systems had to be installed and tested. What followed is very interesting:

The French engineers representing typical Continental expectations wanted an automated system, perhaps because they love planning systems! They wanted it governed by sensors and computers as the best way to ensure safety should something go wrong.

However, the British engineers had other ideas. They wanted manual control. They wanted a safety-control room staffed with computers, screens and someone with a telephone so that the response to any development would be up to the judgment and response of a person.

Apparently in the end there was a compromise and there is some form of both operating – perhaps a manual override on the automatic system?

What I observe at times is that some of us approach worship as a programmed system. When the music stops you sit down. When music starts you stand up. That was programmed in somewhere.

Others are more aligned to waiting for direction. Do nothing until invited or encouraged to do so. That aligns more with the personal management of the British engineers.

Then there are those trying to make sense of what everyone else is doing.

Q: What to make of this?

A: The Holy Spirit who makes worship worship is dynamic in the true sense of that Greek word.⁶ It’s people who make something uniform and regular because we people need some framework some idea of how to flow together. **It is God who initiates and people who perpetuate.**

The Holy Spirit is like a wild river that flows where it will and changes its course by digging out new channels every now and then. People like rivers but want them to stay within expected banks and flow levels. We consider it a disaster when rivers move or overflow their banks yet historically this is what most rivers do.

So we have this balance to strike between the wild freedom of the Holy Spirit calling us in worship to the heart of God and the human desire for the river to stay within assigned bounds.

The way forward is bi-focal awareness.

⁶ *Dunamos* is a biblical term describing the Holy Spirit that was applied to Alfred Nobel’s explosive invention as ‘dynamite’.

Open yourself to God and attend to what the Holy Spirit is saying and doing. Stay with that as primary. Give the Holy Spirit your best attention. Let him take you into worship and more. Enjoy the freedom of using your body in worship as best serves you as much as possible.

Express your groans as treasures to God, even with tears.

At the same time listen out for leadership if some one is shepherding the congregation in a shared flow of worship.

It's about being in your own space with God while in harmony or unity with the congregation as led.

That's the vision of worship I want to commend to you.

Song of response:

Heart of Worship Lyrics

When the music fades

All is stripped away

And I simply come

Longing just to bring

Something that's of worth

That will bless Your heart

I'll bring You more than a song

For a song in itself

Is not what You have required

You search much deeper within

Through the way things appear

You're looking into my heart

I'm coming back to the heart of worship

And it's all about You, it's all about You, Jesus

I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it

When it's all about You, it's all about You, Jesus

King of endless worth

No one could express

How much you deserve

Though I'm weak and poor

All I have is Yours

Every single breath!

I'll bring You more than a song

For a song in itself

Is not what You have required

You search much deeper within

Through the way things appear

You're looking into my heart, yeah

I'm coming back to the heart of worship

And it's all about You, it's all about You, Jesus

I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it

When it's all about You, it's all about You, Jesus

I'm coming back to the heart of worship

And it's all about You, it's all about You, Jesus

I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it

When it's all about You, it's all about You, Jesus