

“Passionate Worship” (Second in “Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations” series; Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper)

Isaiah 6:1-8; Colossians 3:12-17

February 1, 2009

Rev. Deborah Dail

Denbigh Presbyterian Church

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

I recently read about an old Smothers Brothers routine that went something like this:

Dick asked, “What’s wrong, Tommy? You seem despondent?”

Tom replied, “I am! I’m worried about the state of American society.”

“Well, what bothers you about it?” Dick asked. “Is it the poverty and hunger?”

“No,” Tom responded, “I’m not much bothered about poverty and hunger.”

“Is it the violence in our cities?”

“No, I don’t really care about that.”

“Well, then is it the use of illegal drugs among our nation’s youth?”

“No, I have no concern about that.”

Dick says: “Tom, if you’re not bothered by poverty and hunger, violence and drugs in America, what **are** you worried about?”

“I’m worried about apathy.” (*Five Practices: Leader Manual & Media*, “Passionate Worship Is Grateful Worship,” by Allan R. Bevere, p. 100).

One thing most Christians are not apathetic about is worship. Get someone talking about the type of music or the quality of the music in church, for example, and they will get pretty fired up. “I hate those 7-11 songs—you know, singing the same 7 lines 11 times.” “I can’t stand those boring hymns with words I’ve never

heard of before that are too hard to sing and all sound the same.” “We don’t sing enough old hymns like the ones I learned growing up.” No apathy there.

One thing most Christians are not apathetic about is worship. Get someone talking about dancing or raising hands or utilizing media in worship. No apathy there, for sure, especially in some Presbyterian circles. There is much to be said and much to be said passionately

I find people are not apathetic about dress codes for worship services, length of sermons and services, bulletin formats, announcements and expected behaviors. I find most Christians are not apathetic about the sanctuary they are used to worshiping in—how it should be painted, heated or arranged and what can and cannot be done in a sanctuary.

There is no lack of passion among most Christians when it comes to worship, so why in the world does our series on “The Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations” have a lesson on Passionate Worship? We are already passionate about worship. Or are we?

Perhaps many of us are a lot like Tom in the Smothers Brothers routine. Maybe we’re worried about the wrong thing, while missing the real thing. Maybe our passions are misdirected.

Worship is about God. Worship is for God. It’s not first and foremost about us. It is not first and foremost for us. Worship, both the corporate worship we do in this and other sanctuaries and our personal times of worship, are to be God-directed, God-focused and God-surrendered. Of course we never leave ourselves behind because while we worship God simply for who God is, our gratitude is always linked to what God has done for us.

When the Prophet Isaiah entered the temple, he was encountered by God—our Holy, Almighty Lord of heaven and earth. In awe of God and God’s holiness, Isaiah immediately recognized his own unholiness and that of his people. Isaiah is aware of his sin. His awe turns to shame and humility. He confesses his sin.

Do we want worship to do this to us? Frankly, I like to feel good in worship. Why do we always have to bring up sin?

God immediately responds to Isaiah’s passionate confession: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts! God, through the seraph, touched the lips of Isaiah with a hot coal. “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.”

It's good to be reminded that we're forgiven. Now we're off the hook for another week. Whew! I'm glad I came after all. I did get something for me. Well, not so fast.

God says to Isaiah, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isaiah replies, "Here am I; send me!"

I didn't come here to be sent—to be given a job to do. I came here to get my weekly fix so I could face the week ahead. Wait! God didn't forgive me just so I could feel better. God forgave me so he could send me?

I hope this flow of a worship service sounds familiar to you. We usually begin with praise and worship, we move to confession, we are assured of our forgiveness, we are beckoned to service and we are sent out to serve.

I find when I worship God with all my heart, when I earnestly confess my sins and receive the assurance of forgiveness, the pain I brought with me into the time of worship is put in new perspective—sometimes it is even healed. I come with so many needs I hope to have met in times of worship, but by the end my needs seem small in comparison to the glory of my awesome God.

Paul's words in Colossians are powerful ones. He reminds us that at the heart of worship is gratitude. And be thankful, he says. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:15b-17).

Gratitude and thanksgiving are the heart of worship—whether it is corporate or personal; whether it is the worship we do in this place or the worship we live through our deeds in daily life.

How passionate are we about worshiping God? Are we ever apathetic about worshiping God, while being passionate about evaluating a worship service? If so, are we passionate about the wrong things?

Jesus' suffering and death is referred to as the Passion. May we enter into this time of communion, Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, with gratitude in our hearts. May we be passionate about the one whose passion we remember in this meal.