
GENUINE WORSHIP

So, here it is again.

- Another Sunday morning.
- Another hour of sitting and attempting to sing those unfamiliar songs and trying to stay awake through the sermon,
 - or at least trying not to let anyone see you falling asleep.
- Another day of coming to this place, making sure that GOD sees you doing this thing we call worship.

A survey of 1,800 Christians asked them to define what worship means.

- Two-out-of-three had no idea or said, “attending church,” or “being a member,” or “believing GOD exists.”
 - How many people come to worship thinking that it is something we do to earn a blessing or to guarantee GOD’s love or to insure a place in heaven?
 - How many come to worship, not because it’s something we want to do, but because it’s some sort of obligation.

I realize I’m being a little bit harsh and cynical about those who come to worship.

- But I also suspect that many, if they are truly honest with themselves, would admit that they feel that worship is something they must do, rather than something they want to do,
 - something that must be done to stay right with GOD.

Although it’s not immediately obvious, this is the very issue in today’s Gospel reading.

- The question about our motivation for worship is the very same question that is at the heart of JESUS’ action in the cleansing of the Temple.
- JESUS had entered the outer court of the Temple—the entry of the Temple.
 - HE saw the Passover pilgrims from other areas of the nation of Israel and beyond coming to worship,
 - and then HE watched them exchange their money for the only coins that would be acceptable for the Temple tax.
 - He watched them purchase sheep and oxen and birds for the worship sacrifice.
 - And the longer HE watched, the angrier HE became.
- So, JESUS took some cords and made a whip, and with it HE drove the moneychangers and animal sellers out of the Temple.
 - And in doing so, HE was rebelling against the abuse of religion with an action that is perhaps puzzling and even disturbing to those of us whose image of JESUS is one of gentleness and meekness.

Religion is a grand thing.

- Christianity in particular has been the source of much of what is good and humane in the world.
 - But we all know that even the best and most powerful human exercise can be abused,
 - and that includes the practice of Christian faith.
 - We’ve seen it in the fall of some TV evangelists and in the pedophile scandal,
 - in religious leaders who seem to have allowed their position as spiritual guides to excuse them from the Christian responsibilities they announce to others.
 - Just as it is in our day, the abuse of religion can be found in any age and seemed to be the name of the game in JESUS’ time.

JESUS' anger was provoked by the fact that the Temple had been reduced to what JESUS called a "market," or a "house of trade."

- It wasn't just the money changing and selling that stirred up HIS ire.
- HIS outrage against the Temple and its trade was much more than a judgment on commercialism.
 - John says that it all took place at Passover, the most important time of worship for Jews, when thousands of Jewish pilgrims came from throughout the Roman empire to Jerusalem to worship in the great Temple.
 - These people had made a holy pilgrimage, the most pious expression of religious life a devout Jew of that day could make.
- But once in Jerusalem, these pilgrims faced two problems:
 - They needed acceptable animals for sacrifice, and they needed coins without the image of Caesar that the Temple would call a false god, to pay the Temple tax.
 - Only unblemished animals and they could only be purchased from the Temple with specially minted Temple coins.
 - Without them, the long pilgrimage would be in vain.
 - Obviously, there existed a good market for those who could provide those suitable coins and animals.
 - So, for a moderate commission, moneychangers supplied the Temple coins and sellers kept an ample supply of animals on hand.
 - Whether or not the fees charged by those people were exorbitant—which it was—makes little difference.
 - This story is not about price gouging.

The pilgrims were being robbed.

- They were being robbed, not of their money, but of a genuine encounter with GOD on GOD's own terms.
 - Why? Because in the mind of every worshiper who came to the Temple was the assumption that in return for the payment of these Temple fees, GOD would grant favor upon them.
- It wasn't worship; it was trade.
 - They paid; GOD blessed.
 - The temple encouraged a worship of trade in which GOD provided insurance for a good life, so long as the worshiper kept up with the premiums.
 - And it was against that attitude that JESUS rebelled.

Basically, there are two kinds of worship

- One is based on the person achieving a satisfactory relationship with GOD by doing something that pleased GOD.
 - The other is based not on what the person does, but rather upon what GOD does.
- This second one is genuine worship.
- Genuine worship is not a worship of bargaining.
 - That's a kind of "Worship for Dummies."
 - You give your money, your sacrifice, your whatever, and GOD will love you.
 - That's a worship based on trad where we control GOD.
 - "GOD, I made my sacrifice, so you have to love me."
 - But that's not how GOD works, is it?

Genuine worship begins when we allow ourselves to be taken hold of by the ONE holy GOD and surrounded by the reality of GOD's presence at every turn of life

- both the good and the bad.
 - Genuine worship is not based on outside actions that provide an inside sense of security or hope in the individual.
 - Genuine worship is inside out—responding to the presence of GOD in one's life,
 - and then living in response to that wonderful life.
-

I know it doesn't make sense.

- Why do something when there's no benefit in it for you?
 - Isn't that the way the world works?
 - But that's what Paul is challenging when he writes that the religion of the cross is foolishness to the world.
 - It goes against all that we see in the world—all the rules about how to get ahead and win the favor of GOD.
 - It says that it's not what you get that motivates our worship.
 - It's what we've already received that leads us to GOD.
-

The cross means that the days of bargaining with GOD are over.

- The cross takes the place of all animal sacrifices and trade.
- GOD holds the cross of CHRIST before us as we come to the altar this day, and GOD says to us, "See how much I love you."
 - You cannot buy so great a love.
 - No coins.
 - No lambs or doves.
 - No special acts of piety.
 - If we want GOD, we must cling to that cross, not because of what we think we can get out of it,
 - but only because we cannot resist the love and forgiveness it stands for.
 - If we want GOD, we must come to the table and partake of what GOD has already given us, not because it will earn us GOD's blessing,
 - but only because there we can taste and see the goodness of GOD.
 - If we want GOD, we must make our worship genuine—an honest response to what GOD has made ours:
 - an outpouring of the love GOD has placed in our heart through the death and resurrection of JESUS.

"Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."

- Worship at the Temple is no longer necessary.
 - The Temple is gone, but the Temple that is JESUS body lives.
 - And clinging to that, living for that, makes your worship genuine.
-

Cling to the cross.

- Don't let your worship become a house of trade.
 - Nothing we could offer GOD could ever measure up to what GOD gives free and clear.
- Rejoice in the cross even when it seems foolish to do so.
 - Because that, Christians, is genuine worship.