

Spirit and Truth

“Your worship serves God.”

John 4:16-26

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What Was That All About?

Sunday afternoon, the people started coming through the doors. At first it was a little reassuring. Members of Second Grace Church were appearing, including the children in their choirs. I was relieved: they found their way to the church.

Then more came and started finding their way to the sanctuary. Royal Oak members positioned themselves at each entrance to the church. They put on their happy face and more people arrived: from Royal Oak First and Second Grace and even some friends and relatives. People kept coming.

By the time the introductions were made and the drummers came in with trumpet sound, the sanctuary looked pretty full. Not bad for a Sunday afternoon. Not bad for a special worship that no one was *obliged* to attend.

And the drummers stirred spirits. Dancers excited the air with streamers and flags and dignified movements giving accent to the music's message. And the choirs sang proclamations of the Word: God's living word that surely fed the soul. Children's choirs, youth choirs from Second Grace and Royal Oak First...

At last they all joined together in one combined choir, raising their voices, *O Freedom!* they sang. They moved us. And I could tell that we had all gone beyond just being fed, as sacred as that nourishment may have been.

That moment we were all together. *We were* God's new community. Differences of neighborhood, culture, and race had dissolved. We were now one.

One in joy. One in faith. One in the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace.

We had become a sign of a Day to come for Greater Detroit and for the world. A sign, I believe, of Beloved Community: the very picture of what God has in mind for all of creation.

'Overstating it? I don't think so. If you saw the tables in Fellowship Hall you'd have a hard time denying it. A banquet was set with food cooked in the kitchens of our homes: cultural foods and best recipes from some of the finest cooks in the land. We mixed together at our tables and broke bread together like it was the Heavenly Banquet.

There we were, building relationships. Faith-based relationships. And showing Detroit and Royal Oak and Southeast Michigan what it can be like when all God's children gather together in peace and faith: a joy to the Lord; the kind of gathering that changes things. We were about healing Metropolitan Detroit, one friendship at a time.

More than being fed. We were serving God.

And that is worship.

When Something's Going on in Worship

Back at the well, Jesus talked with the woman who had been so lost no one would have anything to do with her. Going to fetch her water when no one else was there: she had it timed right. It was the moment the very public place could be her private place – free from the comments and the slights that would only cause further hurt. This was a person who had been driven from any possibility of worship at all.

Yet there was Jesus, engaging her. Making contact, drawing her into more authentic worship than most people had ever imagined. He knew her, and yet he spoke to her. He heard her challenges put almost to the point of disrespect: and yet he answered her. And when his knowledge and acceptance of her were making her uncomfortable, she made an attempt to divert the conversation. She said, "Our ancestors worshiped God at this mountain, but you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place for worship, right?"

She walked right into it. This was Jesus' opening. "God is sheer being itself – Spirit. Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration." In other words, in spirit and in truth.

There you go. As much as worship is something to do to get information and find some inspiration for yourself; it has more to do with serving God.

"Why weren't you in church last Sunday?" is one of the annoying things I think most people don't want to hear. Like worshiping is a duty that your mother said you had to do on a regular basis.

Like brushing your teeth.

So a lot of people go the other way and suggest that it's an option: like it doesn't really matter if you go; but you might get something out of it. And when we reduce the commitment to that level it takes something away from its importance.

Is it just another option on the menu of choices we all have on any given Sunday or Saturday night?

In spirit and truth: to adore the Creator of the Universe, the redeemer of our souls, and the Savior of the world is what God's people are called to do.

It's something we do for God.

Why else would we call it a worship *service*?

Not to annoy; and not to be demanding and blaming as though we keep score, like our spiritual grade point average is going to be affected by our attendance record: we come together out of commitment to the greatest Love of our lives. We come together because we are called together.

We praise God: because we are serving God. And when we do, we put ourselves into the hands that fashion us and refashion us to be put to service.

It's a game-changer. Worship. It can change the world.

Given

A pastor from Cincinnati spoke at a conference I was at. He said that one year the leaders of his church decided that they had gotten tired of holding Christmas Eve worship services, so they announced that they weren't going to have any that year. Spend time with families. Relax. That was going to be the theme, I guess.

Funny. He said they started getting calls. It seems that there were others in the church who disagreed with the idea. So they told the church that instead of regular worship services everybody who wanted to really worship were to meet in the parking lot. They did – in fact quite a few of them gathered. They sang a few Christmas carols and prayed. And then they had something like 5,000 Krispy Kreme donuts which they

distributed out to the people and sent them out through the city to take the donuts to people who were stuck working on Christmas Eve.

They went to hospitals and firehouses, police stations and gas stations. One carload of them went through a drive-thru window at Wendy's and when the server asked them on the intercom what they wanted, they said, "We don't really *want* anything. We just want to give you something instead." The window guy didn't believe them until they drove up to the window with the donuts. All the workers in the restaurant gathered around the window to get their donut and see if it was really true. It changed their night.

So it went. All through the city. And, in the name of Jesus, the newborn Prince of Peace, they brought the love of God to people stuck where it might have been hard to feel it.

And this was worship. *Worship service.*

Something happens when you worship. I believe it changed the City of Cincinnati – at least for a while – maybe forever.

It changed a woman who went to get water when it was safe and she was alone...and she wound up shouting the news about Jesus all through the town. 'Woke them up from their sleep. 'Gave them God.

And it changed us. Gave us new friends in Christ. And it changed Greater Detroit: at least for a day; maybe for good.