

Attitude or Gratitude?



Today is Reign of Christ Sunday, how do we receive it ... with gratitude...with attitude? Perhaps with gratitude and attitude! How have you spent your life energies? When others evaluate your accomplishments, what measure do they use? When you consider your life journey, how do you describe it to yourself?

By most standards in our Western world lives are ascribed as successful or as failures in terms of how we move about in our work milieu. Sadly, I think, we are considered successful and therefore a worthwhile human being, in proportion to our capacity to have a focus, maintain a focus and keep it until the end. In the world of commerce, industry, technology and intellectual trade we have this call to be ambitious, sometimes even if it means ignoring other parts of our life.

The Worship Committee has asked that Alan and I help with their reflections on worship as the central practice of Christian communities of faith. What is worship? Why do we worship? And how do we worship? Where and how do we meet God in our lives?

What I want to claim today, and I truly believe this to be the case, is that worship is a place, and a people, gathered to listen to the whispering, thundering message of God. Worship is communion a being one with God together as a people praying, singing, reading, reflecting, and responding with their lives for God's sake in a world where the same things never happen, or seldom happen.

Worship is the place where we are called into being, where our hearts are broken by the power of love and where the mighty and extraordinary regularly occur. Worship is being open to seeing God in the unexpected.

We come to worship because worship provides a sacred space and a sacred moment where we are encouraged and called away from the ordinary everyday values that keep us focused on careers and homes and other activities. Communing with God means putting our everyday life into conversation with the sacred – that's what worship is really all about. But we will never experience the depths and heights that worship can come to mean until and unless we come with attitude and gratitude.

This morning, I want to suggest that we see it in two significant ways. First, we come to be opened up to the unexpected and unusual. God is full of surprises which builds into my second

point, namely, that worship opens us up in love and compassion so that the power we experience in worship is not a moment to savor and save, but an energy to be practiced in the world beyond worship. Let me elaborate on each point.

On a grey Friday in January 2007, during the peak of the early morning commuter rush, an unassuming young man entered the L'Enfant Plaza train station in Washington D.C. As the crowds rushed by, the man found a place to stand out of the way of the foot traffic. He opened the violin case he carried. He threw into the case a few coins and dollar bills to “prime the pump.” And then he proceeded to begin playing.

But this was no ordinary street musician. The anonymous violinist in the train station was Joshua Bell, renowned virtuoso, star of the symphony circuit. Only three days earlier audiences had shelled out between \$100. and \$200. bucks for a ticket to watch him play at Boston's Symphony Hall. Now, as he stood just a few feet from clueless commuters hurrying to work, Bell played his heart out on his multi-million dollar 1713 Stradivarius violin.

Bell began with “Chaconne,” from Bach's Partita No. 2 in D Minor. Bell calls this a “spiritually powerful piece, emotionally powerful, structurally perfect.” By the way, “Chaconne” is also considered one of the most difficult violin solos ever written. Can you guess what happened? Did busy commuters suddenly stop in their tracks, mesmerized by this master violinist, and drift towards the magical music?

Not so much. For the first three minutes of Bell's “concert” no one passing by acknowledged anything. Not the music. Not the musician. Nothing. Nada. Everyone hurried by, head down, fixated on their next destination. At four minutes one woman hurriedly tossed a dollar into Bell's open violin case. Finally, after six minutes, one commuter stopped, leaned against a wall, and listened to the gift that was being poured out into that train station air. Bell played for 43 minutes. He made a grand total of \$32.00 off of 27 donations. (“Better than minimum wage,” Bell noted later). Two people stopped to listen, the other 1,070 people who passed in front of him simply skittered by, oblivious, obsessed by their own agendas.

John Lake, author of *Timeless Beauty* succinctly summed up what this missed moment revealed about all those busy commuters, and about us:

If we can't take the time out of our lives to stay a moment and listen to one of the best musicians on Earth play some of the best music ever written; if the surge of modern life so overpowers us that we are deaf and blind to something like that, then what else are we missing?

Worship is our intentional plan to stop, take the time, pray, sing, read, listen, and respond, precisely because we know we are often missing those elements in the rest of our lives, and because we so desperately long for the elemental Spirit of God in our lives.

The Psalmist, who was both a poet and a musician, asked, “What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me?” (Psalm 116:12). But we have to recognize God’s gifts before we can offer thanks for them!

St. Paul prays that the Ephesian Christians will come to “know” all God’s gifts, because with this knowledge there will come a perpetual posture of thankfulness, or as we preachers like to put it, an “attitude of gratitude.”

We have done nothing to deserve these divine gifts. In fact, we have done pretty much everything there is to do to get us crossed off God’s gift list. Yet here we are, confronted on a daily, an hourly, a minute-by-minute basis, with the grace of God’s manifold gifts given to us.

It is this position that encouraged the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart to declare, “If the only prayer you say in your whole life is thank you that would suffice.” Recognizing the divine in every moment, no matter how unexpected, you should take a look at the first audition of a completely unassuming contestant on “Britain’s Got Talent”, the British version of “Canadian Idol.”

Paul Potts is a mobile-phone salesman who desperately wants to sing opera. He is also pudgy, has horrid teeth, chipped and uneven, and wore a dreadfully ill-fitting, cheap-looking suit. He looked like the guy who never could get a date, and was a member of the chess club (but not one of the really smart ones!). He looked like the one destined from the womb to only hope to achieve mediocrity. The panel of judges looked at each other ‘with attitude’ and then with a casual wave of his hand, Simon Cowel tells Paul to sing.

Then this unassuming Paul Potts begins to sing and those who heard were filled with ‘gratitude!’ Here is the YouTube video clip.

Show clip here –

If we were to judge Paul Potts by his first appearance, we might miss the glory of his voice. Our worship brings us together because we hope and we expect the unlovely and unloved of the world to help give us life-saving gifts. Once we experience surprising graces from God, as gifts of life, we will truly understand all about the exchange of gifts between those who need and those who have in this world. When you give to one of them, you give to Jesus; when you give to one of them, the gifts of life return to you.... Communion is served and Christ reigns!

Worship is the place where we are oriented toward that kind of attitude and that depth of gratitude in a never-ending, but always expanding, cycle of praise. Let those who have ears, hear and respond. Amen

