

Arise and Shine: Stir Worship's Recipe

Luke 22: 14-20

Annie Dillard, in "Teaching the Stone to Talk", states of our casual attitudes of our worship of the Almighty She says, "I don't find Christians outside of the ancient catacombs, sufficiently aware of conditions. Do we have the foggiest idea of the potency of the power we invoke? Sometimes, I think worshippers are children who think they are playing with a toy chemistry set. We're holding the ingredients that could blow up the neighborhood. Yet, we wear straw and velvet hats to church; we should be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should pass out life preservers rather than bulletins. We are to enter into worship fully aware of the potential of this life-giving power.

We inhale new, abundant and eternal life, forces that do for us what we can't do for ourselves. The thanks, praise, and promise of service we express in worship is the exhaling breath of the soul. Worship is as necessary as it is for our lungs to expel the air, we breathe in. After inhaling the goodness and grace of God in our lives, we must exhale song, prayer and response.

What are the ingredients for a worship recipe that allows us to spiritually breathe? We see in the text today that traditions of those who preceded us have already answered that question. The two primary ingredients in the recipe for life giving worship are: WORD and SACRAMENT. Other spices are welcome, hospitality, performance arts, fellowship, and anything else we include in worship. Word and sacrament are essentials we shall examine.

THE WORD: We are speaking of two stratum when we say God's Word is fundamental to life-giving worship. The foundation under all worship is THE WORD, Christ who took his place at the head of the table in the Luke passage. The priority of our witness in worship maintains the proper position of the One who from the beginning is the living WORD. Thus, the words we speak and sing in worship are reflections of the place we set for the original WORD that became flesh and is the life and light of our world.

The people in the pew are the performers in life-giving worship I'm the prompter, helping with lines and urging others to do their part; Christ is our

audience; the object and primary objective of worship. Worship that places Christ at the head of the table will not be boring or only understood by the few. The performers and prompters will choose words spoken and sung with care. The liturgy, "the people's work" will be handled like dynamite for the living WORD worship is life shaping, changing, and giving at the same time.

THE WORD SPOKEN: The spoken word is reverent. Keep in mind the nature one of the whom we worship. Our Founder spoke how God's kingdom is built, saying, '*I eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.*' We enter into this room with a reverence that breeds humility if we believe the way up is the way down for us each of us. We are to rightfully divide the spoken word, so it speaks clearly of the cycle of life portrayed by the one we worship, who moved from life, to suffering and death, and to new life again.

The starting point for the spoken word in worship is reverence, otherwise the spoken word can be misdirected. If we want to say a serious word to our spouse, we choose words with care; we want the right message to be heard. If we are too cavalier with our words, we might see our first flying saucer; coming from the other side of the kitchen. Can I get an Amen?

The spoken word is joyful. Once our humility has tempered our spoken word, we can speak and read the word with great delight. The spoken word should sound like a young child opening up their Christmas gift, voices of two persons speaking of their love for each other for the first time; or the what we would say after being told we are the recipients of a great inheritance. The message of new life spoken in the worship ought to cause us to jump for joy before the last hymn is sung. If you find your face taut and your voice silent, I invite you to "do what is right until it feels right, speak the word joyfully.

THE WORD SUNG: The Matthew and Mark version of the Last Supper ends, "*When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*" Our faith comes from song. The earliest strata of the New Testament texts come from hymns of the early church. Paul quotes those

hymns because most orthodoxy springs from doxology, and scripture comes from worship. Song is the root of many of our beliefs and doctrines.

Plato says five centuries before Christ: "Music gives soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, charm to sadness, happiness and life to everything. Or as Bono of U2 fame said: "Music can change the world because it can change people." The reason music is so powerful is it has the ability to cross time and space, joining the chorus of selections that have been sung by people of every age. Our songs connect us to people of other times who also desired to express their faith.

Our song selections will cross time and place as we step into our new worship experiences, employing all genres of music. Our blended worship style will allow us to sing songs of joy, gratitude, wonder, sorrow, grief, and outrage. Most importantly, they will always give witness to the WORD!

Depending on the season or worship purpose, we'll sing Bach and Battistelli (an outstanding new artist). At times, Joey's fingers on the keyboard or Ken's riffs on the guitar will take us to the throne room or to our knees. There will be Sundays when a mezzo will take us to new heights, or an improvised melody will bless our hearts. Regardless of the genre we will sing because our songs will come from the same place as our smiles, deep within. The product, performers or our preferences matter not. What matters is the songs we sing engage our souls with the Living WORD.

A story from El Mozote, El Salvador reminds us we sing in order to assert a reality to come, which belongs to God. On December 11, 1981, national army units killed every person in the village, as a warning to communist insurgents. We learn later many of the villagers were gathered in the church, singing hymns. The soldiers could take their lives, but not their souls that poured out their soul to the Living WORD that gives life eternal.

SACRAMENT: The one ordinance our Savior left behind was to partake of the meal as a remembrance of his presence among us though he was going to be absent in body. Our founder of Methodism said, *"If therefore we have any regard for the plain command of Christ, ... then we should neglect no opportunity of receiving the Lord's Supper"*.

Presently, we follow this rule of spiritual life monthly. I would like us to talk about weekly communion. Its current revival is Christ's church attempt to address the individualistic spirituality that is failing our culture. Since, we tend to forget, we need to be reminded we're a community in communion with Christ and each other. The communion table says clearly, we are connected. Weekly communion enables us to include all persons in this connection by offering Christ's invitation at our open table. In my childhood Baptist church, we sang invitation songs like: Just As I Am three times to be sure all knew they were invited. I would like us to consider sharing the holy meal weekly so the means of grace may be offered more frequently, allowing more persons to encounter the Living WORD.

I imagine persons entering through those doors each week, ready to offer fresh expressions of worship to Christ because of what the WORD has done for them what they could not do for themselves. I imagine others you invited walking in with who you. I imagine the weekly shaping of lives as we speak and sing of the Living Word. Last, I imagine the joy felt as the grace of God is received each week at this table. Lives are shaped when we mix the ingredients needed in the recipe for life giving worship.

In C. S. Lewis' book, Lion, Witch, and Wardrobe, he tells of the children angst at meeting the lion, Aslan. One of the girls ask the friendly beavers: "Is he safe?" Mrs. Beaver says, "If anyone who can appear before Aslan without knees knocking, they are either braver than most or silly." "Then, he isn't safe?" says Lucy. "Safe?" said Mr. Beaver, who said anything about safe? Of course, he isn't safe, he's our King, but he is GOOD!"

We will gather in our new worship experiences to exhale our worship and praise because we are recipients of the good grace in our lives. They will be marked by the spoken and sung word that reveres the Living Word. We will weekly commune with Christ at the head of the table and each other, whether the table is set or not. If we properly mix word and sacrament, our worship experiences may not be safe, but they will be good.