

1 “Worship in Heaven and on Earth”

Isaiah 6:1-13, John 4:7-26

Think for a moment and try to name in your mind a worship service that was particularly meaningful for you. You got that in your head?

I bet that that worship service was in some way about relationship. It was not just an interesting idea, but someone important to you did something during that service.

We bring our relationships in to worship with us.

Joys and concerns is a profoundly relational time, where we unite in prayer for people, surrounding them with love.

The Peace of Christ is a relational time.

The scripture and sermon are aimed at another relationship – the one we have with God. And we try to get some wisdom with which to make our relationships with people better.

The praise songs we sang at the beginning of worship were about relationship to God.

Worship is about relationships, and I want to give you an example. Over the last six years, we have come to use many different prayer responses:

I’m going to sing a few bars from some responses, and I’d like you to raise your hand if you recognize it.

He is Lord,

Emmanuel, Emmanuel,

Surely the Presence of the Lord is in this place,

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,

It’s me, it’s me, it’s me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.

Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me,

Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness,

Near to the heart of God,

Lead me, Lord,

Holy, holy, holy.

God is so good,

“Lord, Be Glorified”

Change my heart, O God,

Into my heart, into my heart,

“Sanctuary”

Lord, listen to your children praying,

2 “Worship in Heaven and on Earth”

In your time, in your time;
“With Every Breath”

You probably didn’t know you knew so many of them.

Each of those simple prayer responses is about our relationship to God.

Worship is about relationships. Think of Jesus’ meeting with the woman at the well. What was that about except relationships? Go call your husband...

We worship on this mountain, you worship in Jerusalem...
Which one is true? How do we love God best?

The book of Revelation gives us the picture of worship happening in heaven all the time. So what we do here is a reflection of the relationship the angels have with God.

Four-fold pattern

Look in your bulletin – four sections

This is the skeleton on which we’ve hung both the traditional and contemporary services.

If we were to blend worship services together, it would hang on this skeleton.

We no longer sing the doxology every Sunday.

For that matter, I doubt that many of you could tell me what a doxology is. (It’s a short hymn, often closing out a part of worship.)

There are now nine offering responses that we sing together on a regular basis, rotating them and spreading them out over time.

Our worship has become more participatory.

Worship is a journey we take together.

We are talking this month about whether we would like to blend our services. I’m not saying we should; I’m not saying we shouldn’t. We would lose some things. We would gain some things.

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It is clear, however, that our worship services won't stay the same. They will always be changing to some degree.

If we were to move to a blended service, it would be different from both services we have now. It would likely make better use of symbols: banners, water, altar decorations, perhaps objects like the three wise men. That's why we, as an example, opened with symbols of coming to worship:

- the ringing of the bell – calling the community together
- the lighting of candles – telling us the light of Christ is among us
- the pouring of water – reminding us of God's promises and our promises in baptism

We might use silence a bit more

We might use drama

Good worship is already a blend:

Focusing inward at times, and focusing outward at other times.
Good worship touches the feelings, stretches the intentions, gives the mind something to chew on. It blends together all of those things.

Worship is about relationship, and relationships are complicated. You cannot define a relationship any more than you can define God. There are some things about a relationship you can know intellectually. There are some things about a relationship that you just have to feel. There are some things about a relationship that will forever remain a mystery.

Maybe that's what the story of Jesus and the woman at the well is all about. The woman talked to Jesus about lots of different things: the well, living water, husbands, worship, the messiah – a lot of territory, some of which was visible and tangible, and some of which was spiritual and hard to grasp.

But when their conversation was over, the woman went into town and said to her acquaintances: “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!”

When we have truly worshipped, we know that God knows us completely, and cares about all we do.

Thanks be to God. Amen.