

## Toward a Theology of Worship that is Missional and Vocational

Model Theological Conference on Worship

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January 12, 2010

### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Context

I have a missionary friend in Munich Germany by the name of Robert Millar. Robert once told me his approach to the missional task in Munich. I think he borrowed the analogy, but he said this: The church has become like a fort in a 1950's western. A fort where the pioneers hole up for safety amidst a wild land full of savages. Rarely do they venture outside the fort. Occasionally the cavalry will dispatch a posse to rescue a captured pioneer. Then Robert said: But me, I don't lock myself in the fort, **I live out among the teepees.**

### The Fort and the Teepees

At the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium, the church finds herself more amongst the teepees than the safety of the fort. We are living more in Babylon than in Jerusalem. Until Jesus returns, Christians will always live as "strangers and exiles on earth" the writer to the Hebrews says (Heb. 11:13) but it seems that the 21<sup>st</sup> century is even more like exile than promised land. Christendom – not Christianity – Christendom in America has cracked and is crumbling. No longer can we assume at least a memory of Biblical allusions. Within a mile of my house in South St. Louis city I have Iraqi neighbors, an Islamic Center with a 100 ft minaret, thousands of Bosnian immigrants. I have homosexual neighbors on my block, educated urban hipsters at the coffee shop down the street discussing philosophy. You know this too.

The mission of the church in this frontier future belongs to the Daniels who stand in pagan exile and do not bow down. It belongs to the Paul's who winsomely and with conviction stand on Mars Hill and profess the resurrection of Jesus Christ. While the church must always gather - the fort so to speak - the reality is that the church stands on a frontier and must know how to live among the teepees. The Christian community is not an isolated cult, but a people gathered in the world, for the world. Like Abraham heard Gen. 12, we are blessed to be a blessing to the nations.

### How can we live among the teepees?

The question of mission and vocation is **how can we live among the teepees?** How can we worship the living God *in Babylon*? How can we bear witness on *Mars Hill in Athens*? Even greater, how can our people? A fifth grade boy? A prominent businessman? A mother of four? How do we as leaders of the church faithfully preach, teach, exhort, train, and disciple God's people to live in their various corners, bearing witness to the hope we have in Christ?

**We contend here today that worship, by its sacramental and sacrificial nature, forms missionary disciples to live out among the teepees.**

### **Worship as “Our Theology”**

- “Our Theology” (Luther in Galatians lectures, vol. 26)
- “active and passive righteousness”  
A staple of Luther’s theology. Passive righteousness is that the first move is always God’s. Passive righteousness is that God acts on us, comes to us, apart from us. Extra nos. From the outside. By grace. God gets the credit. Active righteousness is what we do. Our works, our praise, our vocations. Always and only animated from God’s first move.
- **Sacramental and Sacrificial** “Our theology” is not limited to theology books. It has real significance, not the least of which is worship, where we get at the sacramental and sacrificial natures of worship.

Dr. Norman Nagel, in the introduction to **Lutheran Worship: “Our Lord speaks and we listen. His Word bestows what it says . . . The rhythm of our worship is from him to us, and then from us back to him.”** The rhythm is gift and response. Give and give back. Sacramental and sacrificial. God’s presence and our praise.

### **Worship as the Whole Christian Life**

- **The sacramental and sacrificial nature of worship is the paradigm of all Christian life.** Luther’s “our theology” of active and passive righteousness is not stuck in volume 26. It permeates all our life and practice. This rhythm of gift and response, sacramental and sacrificial – it’s our theology of **worship** and it’s our theology of **life**.
- **Worship as the Christian life in miniature.** This rhythm displayed in our worship is the rhythm of the Christian life. Everyday we awake to invoke the name of the Triune God who created and redeemed us. Every day we sit under the powerful Word of God. Every day we repent, rest in forgiveness, pray, praise, and give thanks.
- **The worship service on one day invites a life of worship on every day.** Worship sets the tone so that the rhythm is every day. It is the pattern of daily devotion and daily life. God gives, I give back. He speaks, I listen, I respond. We begin to see that worship, by its rhythmic nature of him to us and us to him, has implications that permeate the whole of Christian life. The rhythmic nature of worship is the pulse of one’s life as a missionary and vocational specialist.

### **Worship as Missional**

- ***“Is a worship service evangelism?”*** I want to touch briefly on this. I could spend time talking about how your worship service can appeal to the unchurched or non-believers. But I won't because I contend that Christian worship is just that – CHRISTIAN WORSHIP. It is for Christians. Now does that mean that we deny guests, or friends, or “seekers”? No. Our worship is public. We should expect guests. We should conduct ourselves as if there will be a Buddhist this Sunday, or an atheist. But is Christian worship for them? And is worship the best first contact with the Christian community? The Buddhist or the atheist's first contact with the Christian community will not be in worship, it will be with an individual who lives next to them out in the teepees.
- **Worship as missional, NOT attractional**  
A common discussion in the evangelical world today is the death of the attractional church. Since Willow Creeks Reveal study came out in 2007, churches have been reevaluating worship and discipleship. The finding is that seeker services that were used to attract the unchurched were not effective in long term commitment and discipleship. Trying to get unchurched people to church was a short term experience and quickly fizzled.
- **Worship as missional in that it is God encountering his Church, the missionaries.** I contend that worship is missional in that it is God encountering his Church, the missionaries. The front line of the mission is in the teepees, not the fort. The pioneers who are out living among the teepees are our members, the church, the body of Christ. Acts 2:42
- **Worship as “making disciples,” those who have encountered Jesus.** The Great Commission is not to invite to church. It is to make disciples and baptize. How do we make disciples? A good start is worship, where God encounters us with the rhythm he expects for our whole life – he speaks and we listen, him to us and us to him. We believe that in Word and Sacrament, we encounter the presence of the risen Lord. And those who have encountered Jesus make good missionaries. Just ask Saul turned Paul.

### **Worship as Vocational**

- **The sacramental nature of worship invites the sacrificial.** Divine worship is the venue for encountering the living God. And when we encounter the living God, we are animated for living. We have the privilege of responding in our various vocations, or callings.
- **“Freedom in Christ for service to neighbor.”** *Dr. Rich Carter on the faculty at Concordia, St. Paul offered a summary of vocation. Worship is where the “freedom in Christ” is made reality. And service to neighbor through vocation only truly happens when one is granted freedom in Christ.*

- **Divine Worship makes good husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, children, employees, students, etc.** We want our people to be vocational specialists in a God given craft. We see our vocations as crafts and we want to be excellent at them. Because they serve our neighbor, they glorify God, and they bear witness to God. *We may pick up the nuts and bolts of the trade outside of Sunday, but we can only become excellent in our vocations when freed by Christ, the Christ we encounter in Word and Sacrament.*

**We contend here today that worship, by its sacramental and sacrificial nature, forms missionary disciples to live out in the teepees.** You may say, “OK, that sounds good Pastor Cloeter, but what does that look like?”

### **Illustrated**

In our congregation, we have a handful of young women who like Latin Salsa dancing, and frequent a salsa club. They are godly women of integrity and faith. They go out dancing on Saturday night. Young men are attracted and intrigued by these girls. It doesn't hurt that they are pretty. They quickly discover that these girls are Christians and are going to worship in the morning. And so in the last year, we have had young men walk into worship on a Sunday morning who had met our girls salsa dancing the night before. Young men from Columbia, Peru, Venezuela, former Buddhist whose family immigrated from Hong Kong.

Those who are animated by the power of the Word, those who have encountered Jesus by their proximity to bread and wine, body and blood – they are of a different realm. They have sat with their Father in heaven, they have hallowed his name, His kingdom has come to their ears and lips, His will has governed and guided them, they have trusted him for daily bread, their trespasses have been forgiven. So that when they go out on the frontier to live among the teepees, people say, “There is something different about you. You seem like someone who knows God.” Worship forms and shapes them, makes them who they are – shining, baptized daughters in Christ. What God does in the context of a worship service makes for good missionaries, makes for good vocational specialists, makes for godly young women who can dance. How does worship do this? Some obvious things:

Every week we celebrate the Lord's Supper. When someone says, “You seem like someone who knows God” it's only because they have touched and tasted him, that in a real and mysterious way they have come into intimate proximity with the risen Lord himself. Our worship rests on the Word of God, sung, read, preached. Confession of sins, and words of absolution. The Triune name of God invoked, the same name into which they were baptized.

**Some practices of worship that we augment in order to form missionary disciples and vocational specialists:**

**Preaching:** I take the preaching task very seriously. I consider solid, law/gospel, textual proclamation of the Word of God to be essential to the mission. If you are a pastor, *preach well*. Prepare by devoting yourself to the text. Prepare by devoting yourself to prayer – N.T. write notes. And know your context, your people. And then bring the word of God to bear on the lives of your people, who are living out among the teepees. Some things I do homiletically in relation to mission and vocation: 1.) I preach the gospel full on. I believe that the gospel simply in and of itself will instigate a life of witness and service. 2.) I also believe in sanctified exhortation, as Paul gave specific commands to vocational living. I am not afraid to use illustrations of ordinary saints so that people see an image of a godly witness, a good father, a faithful employee. 3.) I sprinkle my preaching with the mission. I lead the mission from the pulpit. Not just on mission Sunday, but infused in all of life.

**Unity and Clarity:** My mentor, Rev. John Schmitdke once said, “A good sermon is one that people hear, and can preach back to their friends.” Unity and clarity are important, not just in preaching but in the whole context of a worship service. While liturgy serves us well here, there are things we can do to augment unity and clarity. From oral cultures, like in the African American community, we learn that oral communication needs repetition. There needs to be a chorus. Can you reduce the theme of that day to a simple sentence or phrase? Like the chorus to a song, the phrase gets repeated in the Scripture readings, prayers, sermon. When people leave, could they speak back what they heard? I repeat the chorus in our welcome and sharing of the peace, in the sermon, just before communion, and in sending just before the benediction. We have also done a verse of the day that we memorize.

**Bridges into the Week:** What happens in worship on one day is lived out on every day. We do things that bridge divine worship into daily worship throughout the week. Our small groups and Bible studies dovetail the text or topic we looked at in worship. The sermon is discussed throughout the week. We are working to teach our people basic spiritual disciplines like prayer, the reading of Scripture. We model it in worship and then equip them to do that on their own throughout the week.

**Leaders that Model:** We take seriously the integrity and the spiritual depth of our leaders – pastors, readers, musicians, elders, communion assistants. People involved in public worship are in a position in which they model the life of a missionary and vocational specialist. They serve the congregation publicly and so people will naturally look to them. When a member says, “How do I bear witness to my faith to the pessimistic guy in the cubicle next to me?” “How do I become a better father?” Their first move will be to the pastor and other congregational leaders. These people will serve as living models of missionary disciples and vocational specialists.

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