



central conference of the evangelical covenant church

Heartfelt Worship

Formal, Traditional, Contemporary, Ancient-Future, Laid Back, Hip Hop, Creative, and I've only named a few. The stylistic approaches to worship are many, gleaned from a rich heritage and crashing into our post modern culture. It's a complicated maze of meaningful experiences that we bring to worship and there has been no more emotional issue between and within our congregations. The consuming of worship which has emerged in the last several decades is as debatable as the choice between Whole Foods and the Walmart Supercenter. Within the Evangelical Covenant Church, even within the Central Conference we can find them all.

When we began exploring the movement of Congregational Vitality within the Covenant several years back, I realized that most people were strapping themselves in for the challenge to move everyone to a "contemporary" approach to worship. The success of church planting, and the trending loss of the 20 to 40 something's in many of our established churches has caused us to admit that something needs to change.

I was part of an early church plant in the late 60's and 70's. I led worship in a "praise band" while the style was still somewhat limited to the emerging "Jesus" culture. We fostered "creative worship" as an identity we were seeking to build off of. A lot of time and planning went into each service and no two were alike. Every moment, every piece was planned painstakingly and had meaning in the overall design. Several of those services were the most meaningful in my life.

In 1976, a friend of mine moved to another town and inquired of the pastor at an established Lutheran church how they could be involved? She told him that her gifts were in the area of creative worship and the pastor promptly replied, "You can take that gift to any other church in town, but not this one." No mixed messages there.

One thing that stuck from those days was a simple definition of worship, "Attributing worth to God". It's not as though God somehow needs our affirming. God knows who God is. But, there is something in the act of heartfelt worship that brings an alignment within us as we seek to be in relationship with the God who is. In light of this alignment worship ceases to be centered in style. It is centered in the relationship between the creator and the creature. It is in worship that we behold the glory of God, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and our place with the risen Christ.

In our family gathering on Christmas Eve, I have been privileged to a performance of wonderful music which has grown increasingly melodic over the past several years by seven grandchildren. The oldest two are 8 this year and the music has become a bit more complex. My appreciation has not. I'm still playing guitar and am yet brought to tears while watching them sing "Silent Night". I appreciate their performance with the heart of a caring grandfather. In a sense this performance is for God. I am the bystander and performer myself. What comes through is not the perfection of the music but the heartfelt nature of the moment. I am pleased with what I hear. God is pleased with what God hears.

Truly in Heartfelt worship style is of little importance. Heartfelt worship is not subjected to the critique of the attendees. (Don't misunderstand. Good planning and good quality are important in creating the environment for God to show up.) Times I have been most impacted in worship have been moments of surprise as I have felt the presence of God.

Heartfelt worship is the congregation standing before God, celebrating the sacraments, celebrating the gospel, celebrating God speaking and us responding, and together, as in a performance, meeting God and feeling his embrace as all creation stands to witness Gods amazing worth.

Shalom

By: Rev. Peter Sjoblom, Director of Congregational Vitality