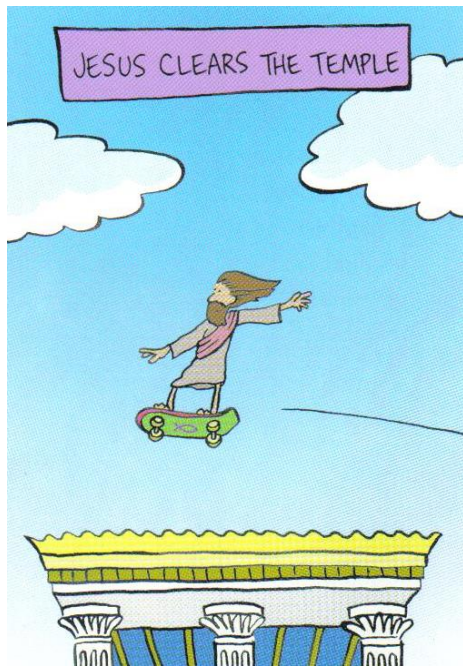


EIGHT PRINCIPLES OF JUST WORSHIP¹

This, second of two reflections on worship, anticipates the Congregational Town Hall this Sunday during which folks from Kincardine United Church will be providing feedback and insight on worship to the Programme Committee. The input will then be woven into the work of the committee over the coming year to continue to refine worship services for the continuing vibrant ministry and mission of the congregation. In outlining these eight principles, my hope is that we will begin to see worship as more than *what we do*. Instead, I pray that these principles will begin our journey to considering worship as our living room – as the place of welcome, of celebration, of nurture, of family discussions and of powerful connection – all within the heart of God.



worship of Jesus' call to love one another as God first loved us.

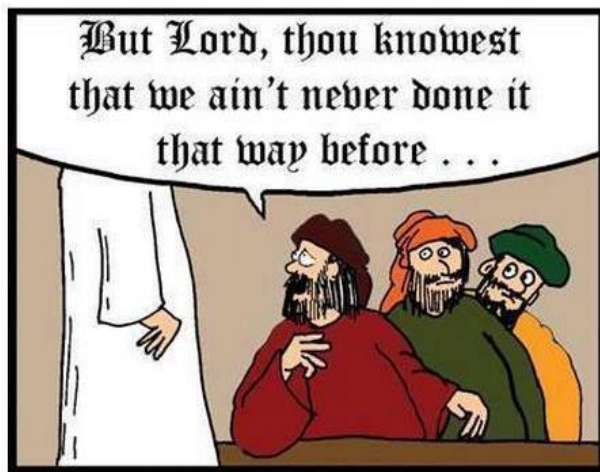
The first principle of a vital church is **MISSION**. We are the church in order to serve the world. God acts and loves the world. We gather in worship to be strengthened, empowered and renewed as God's hands and feet in the world. Contrary to the practise of many, the church does not exist for itself. The church comes together to Christ's call to justice IN the world. By embodying mission, worship creates vision. For example, the "Desperate Family" I talked about two weeks ago has been helped to rent a different house from a trustworthy person, to move into that house and to begin to find work for the members of the family who are able to work (donations are still needed, however, so for details contact Gord). This kind of transformative mission would never have taken place without our hearing the good news in

When we gather for worship we weave the second principle of **COMMUNITY**. While our society is filled with rampant individualism, the welcome we provide, the gracious smiles we share, the helpful attentiveness to the needs of first-time worshippers and the accessibility of our worship space all communicate an atmosphere of relationship, of connection. The prayers I write, the sermons I deliver, the music David plans and leads and the maintenance of the worship space are little more than distractions without people becoming known through mutual respect and loving accompaniment. In worship we become a community.

¹ Kervin, William S. Ed. "Ordered Liberty: Readings in the History of United church Worship." (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2011). pp. 292-300. (These eight principles have been edited and condensed considerably from this wonderful resource, used with permission.)

By taking a theology of inclusion of diversity seriously, we are **AFFIRMING** the third principle. Affirming means we ask who pays the cost and who benefits? It means asking, "Who is the norm?" By growing into the principle of affirming one another, "them" becomes "us." We begin to use a variety of images for God. We lean into discovering who our "us" becomes. Such a journey of becoming is challenging – often painful – but it reflects Jesus' lived expansive welcome of each person who seeks the divine.

One of the primary reasons for the Congregational Town Hall this Sunday is to ensure we don't forget the fourth principle of **PARTICIPATION**. If liturgy is "the work of the people," then all need the opportunity to join in the naming and the shaping of worship. This includes shared worship which, quite frankly, I'm not doing a very good job of encouraging – yet. Indeed, participation needs to incorporate the whole people of God in all its diversity.



The first church committee meeting

Thus, as we actively participate, we engage in **TRUTH-TELLING**. The Apostle Paul wrote that we "see in a mirror dimly." When we continue to do things the way we've always done them, when we regularly defer to the powerful, when we assume a similarity of experience, of education, of understanding, of culture, of belief or of privilege, and when we take for granted certain realities, we silence too many and keep our vision dim. As the fifth principle, truth-telling allows stories to be shared in a safe place so that God's grace becomes part of healing.

SURVIVAL is the sixth principle. This may seem contradictory to the first principle of Mission above, but consider this insight:

"In my Christian tradition, survival has not been regarded as a principle of moral action; it has been seen as selfish and/or cowardly. But as I have become more and more aware of the ways in which I and others have learned to survive in an unjust world, I am impressed by the necessity and creativity of survival.... Surviving is a necessary and important principle.

We should live. Our lives are intrinsically important, and we must exist in networks of those with whom and for whom we are responsible.”²

Incorporating survival into worship means moving to more celebration of creation’s goodness, to focus on the life and resurrection of Jesus, to live into accountability, to emphasise creating justice in the world and to provide courage. It means creating safe places within which worshippers may gather to survive for the sake of the gospel.

To balance survival, we require the seventh principle of **COMPASSION**. This is the ability to be present to one another and to work tenaciously for one another’s well-being. Such presence is undergirded by truth-telling and by truth-listening, so that we take a stance of advocacy and of witness for justice. Silence fosters listening. Announcements become another arena in which to hear. Witness in preaching or by testimony or through our singing or by our actions invites the Spirit in for transformation.



Finally, our worship provides a place of **HEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM**. We are, after all, created in the image of God, in sacrificial, self-giving love stemming from being lovable because we are loved. This eighth principle creates a space within which all are valued and cherished. Thus, worship needs to be a space in which we focus on being God’s beloved. Strong self-esteem grants us the capacity to be humble since we do not need to exert power over others, nor demand that others submit to us. Liturgies for healthy self-esteem make us believe that love is an option.

These eight principles of Christian faith and practice offer hope as we head into the uncertainties of the future. We tend to try to maintain ourselves by conserving and holding onto what has worked in times of expansion. However, the gospel always calls the church outward instead of inward. The gospel calls us to feel the Spirit tugging at our reluctant coat tails, to a new hearing of scripture and to act our way into the new creation into which God continues to draw the world. The least we can do is try.

² Haney, Eleanor. "Vision and Struggle" (Portland: Astarte Shell Press, 1989). pp. 70, 7.