

A Call to Worship

Genesis 4:21

Growing up I can only remember four kinds of pasta. Spaghetti is a given. Who didn't like twirling those long noodles on a fork and slurping the long strands up through your teeth? Then there was classic elbow macaroni from which mom made goulash, macaroni and cheese or a macaroni salad. And of course who doesn't remember Chef Boyardee Ravioli? Finally there was an egg noodle that mom used to make tuna/noodle casserole. That's it. My pasta world was quite limited. After many years I have discovered mostaccioli, lasagna, angel hair pasta and penne noodles among others.

There are anywhere from 350 to 400 different types of pasta and upwards of 600 shapes that are used for all kinds of dishes depending on the occasion. Sure you can substitute one for another in many cases – sort of a mix and match to suit your mood, need, budget or taste. I suppose if you had the patience and time you could substitute lasagna noodles with spaghetti noodles although it would be difficult to substitute large stuffed shells with a macaroni noodle. Most of the time it's okay, but there are some exceptions where it just wouldn't work well.

I find that to be the case with worship as well. There isn't a cookie cutter one size fits all way worship. Worship is different in one region of the world vs. another or even one section of a country vs. another or even between churches within the same city. Worship isn't limited to just one particular style or format or place or time or even the number of things required to include in the order of your service. But there are some things that just don't fit when it comes to worship no matter where or when or how it's presented. Now let me just say here that you can worship chopping wood or milking cows or doing dishes or changing the oil, but when it comes to a gathering of people who assemble to worship together it might not be fitting for Ken to be in the back chopping wood or for Jim to be shearing sheep or for Johnathan to tinker on

his motorcycle at the same time we're all trying to worship.

I think the Lord has given us the flexibility or freedom to shape what worship looks like as long as certain conditions are met. We'll talk about those in a bit.

As a jumping off point for the message I want us to begin in **Genesis 4:21** where we read that Jubal was the father of all those who play the harp and flute. We discovered in the first part of this chapter that there was a right and wrong way to worship. God accepted Abel and rejected Cain not because of their sacrifice but because of the condition of their heart. This morning I want to take a closer look at what worship should be like.

About 30 years ago I had a problem with mice in my house. I was catching lots of them. Someone told me that if you see one mouse you have seven more hiding somewhere. I don't know if that's true, but it seems about right considering all the mice I was catching.

Worship, as you know, includes many things. Giving is an act of worship, singing is an act of worship, prayer is an act of worship and preaching is an act of worship. Worship can be just one thing or it can be many things, but it is all conditioned in the heart. Today I want to focus on one aspect of our worship since it has come up in recent weeks.

Using my mouse analogy that if one person has talked about something there are probably others who are thinking similarly. Over the past couple months there have been several share thoughts with me regarding some of the changes we have made in our worship service specifically related to music. Some of you have liked the changes, others, well, not so much. So today I want to address it and hopefully guide us through Scripture as we move forward in our acts of worship.

Howard Sugden who pastored in Lansing for many years used to say that when the devil fell, he fell in

the choir loft.

To begin let's look at the way of worship in the past.

I. THE WAY OF WORSHIP IN THE PAST

In all of church history there has never been a more contentious and volatile issue in the church that has done more damage to the church than music. In researching the history of Christian music in the church I discovered that from the inception of the church, music has always been divisive. Every generation has had to deal with it. It didn't just pop up in the late 20th century with the Jesus People and contemporary Christian music where long haired hippie types started using bongos and guitars in an effort to kidnap our sacred hymns never to be sung by church choirs or congregations again.

To see the evolution of church music we need to take a brief tour through church to show that concern over styles of music isn't something new. As I launch into this I want to make something very clear – *all music at one time was contemporary and rejected by the established church.*

I want to give you a few reasons why we have made some changes. But before I do I want to thank both Randy and Elaine for what they do in leading our time of singing. Elaine prayerfully and with diligence selects our music each week. She reads the passage to get a sense of what the topic will be. Some weeks it's a challenge because she isn't given much to work with. Try finding songs that go along with false teachers and their destruction or about the fall of man or the curse. I really appreciate her effort and often it's a labor of love. You may from time to time see her wearing gloves with the fingers cut out. She is not trying to be like some hip rock star, it's to keep her fingers warm and lessen the pain from some arthritis that makes it difficult to play. That's why it is for her a true labor of love. So one reason we are making some changes is to help Elaine. She's been doing this for 27 years. It

can be stressful to sing and play hoping what she is playing matches what's up on the screen. So we have added some video songs.

Another reason is that they allow her to introduce some great music that is beyond either her skill as a pianist or range as a vocalist. Some we have sung before while some are new. Some of you may have heard them on the radio, many of you probably not, but that's no reason not to introduce them. Yes, some of them have been a challenge with the scrolling words especially when words are in white and come out of a background of white. Those are the things we're working through.

Some of you may not particularly care for more instrumentation. Some don't like it too loud. Me either. Some have said that the music seems to be slower than when Elaine plays it on the piano. Others wonder if we are trying to be like other churches. Some don't like repetition of choruses. If you look at many of the hymns we sing, they also have repetition. The refrain is a repetition. We sing a stanza then the refrain. We sing the next stanza and the refrain.

Many of today's songs mix it up. They might sing two stanzas with a refrain following it with a third stanza followed by singing the refrain twice. Others sing a stanza then the chorus, sing another stanza then the chorus followed by what's called a bridge and then repeat the chorus again. Okay, sometimes they repeat the chorus too much. It's different from what we are accustomed to.

It's also easier and faster for Elaine to add in PowerPoint and she doesn't have to worry about slides out of order. In the past when Elaine has been gone and she has recorded music on the piano and put the words into PowerPoint at times it was a challenge for Randy to get the tempo.

Many of you remember the days of the overhead projector. It was a bit awkward when Luke changed the transparencies especially if the song had

multiple sheets. At the end of Pastor Don's ministry we had a projector installed. Before that we had the organ and then that gave out. And let's not forget the old piano that needed frequent tuning so we purchased this electric piano through a gift.

At the beginning of church history instruments were not used in worship. While Scripture mentions instruments we don't have a good picture of or how they may have been used in worship.

We know that the Psalms are songs but there are no musical notations to tell us how those songs may have been sung. Some were sung to a certain tune, but we aren't told what that tune sounded like or if any instruments were used while being sung.

Some Psalms were sung antiphonally meaning one person or group sang one part while another group sang the response. When Paul speaks of singing Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs he wasn't referring to Amazing Grace or Blessed Assurance. We don't really know what those songs were or what they sounded like.

When the first century ended, persecution drove the church into the catacombs for the purpose of safety and secrecy. Singing, if any, was kept to a minimum so that noise didn't bring attention to them and incur more suffering. So no musical instruments would have been used. Another reason musical instruments were not used is that in the Roman, Greek, and Egyptian cultures they were associated with pagan rituals and included lewd behavior so the church shied away from their use. They didn't want to be guilty of such behavior.

When Constantine became emperor in the fourth century and recognized Christianity as a state religion the church emerged from underground which only added new problems to the public nature of worship and music. Because much of the music of the time had deep pagan roots there was still great debate among church leaders about whether or not to include any music. This vigorous debate

continued in the 4th and 5th centuries about using instruments. Consequently any singing in the church remained unaccompanied. Early church father Clement wrote that only one instrument should be used, that being the word of peace. He went on to say that the psaltery (seen on screen), trumpet, cymbals, and flute should only be used for summoning to battle. Others suggested only using those instruments that were mentioned in the Bible. In the 5th century at the Fourth Council of Carthage they blessed the liturgical singers by exhorting them to only sing with their mouths what they believed in their heart. It was also during that era that there was a stronger emphasis on professional singers as opposed to congregational singing in an effort to ensure that music met the highest standard, but still no instruments. The debate continued.

Chrysostom was adamantly opposed to instruments and those who only wanted singing won the battle for the time being. For nearly 1,000 years singing remained unaccompanied.

Some early church fathers went so far as to support Paul's teaching that women should remain silent in church even in singing. Ambrose of Milan stated that he preferred women to keep silent but he would rather have them sing than chatting.

By the way, it was Ambrose and Chrysostom who began to incorporate congregational singing in their churches.

As the papal nature of the church began to emerge so did the inception of chanting most likely taken from Jewish tradition. An example would be the Gregorian chants. By adding musical notes it was a way of teaching and reciting Scripture and doctrine. While not monotone in nature their musical notes did not vary much beyond four notes and only those that would be the white keys of the piano. Anything more was considered excessive. Eventually musical notes of the chants became more melodic, but never with any harmony. Harmony was forbidden. In time a rift grew between the Western Church and

Eastern Church. One only wanted Biblical text while the other wanted more leniencies in the text.

Fast forward to the Renaissance period. Instruments began to be more widely accepted in congregational singing. The first instrument to take rise in churches was the organ and then only in large cathedrals, but it was the exception and not the rule. With the Renaissance period and the rise of skilled musicians, small ensembles began to accompany singing using stringed instruments, trumpets, and woodwinds, but this also met with resistance, especially since some of the hymn writers of the day were using familiar tunes coming from the theater or taverns because they were familiar.

Think, for example, if John Newton had written Amazing Grace in the 1960's. Taking a popular tune of the day it may have been sung like this: (To the tune of Gilligan's Island)

Amazing grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found
Was blind but now I see.

You can well understand why secular tunes were considered sacrilegious with sacred text. Now try and get that tune out of your heads when you sing Amazing Grace.

During this period of church and music history harmony was introduced. The soprano carried the melody and the alto, tenor and bass sang the harmony.

Music leaps were made when the Guttenberg press was invented utilizing movable type. But even then, the Reformation period spurred greater worship wars related to music and instruments. Everyone had an opinion. If we were to go around the room and conduct a survey we would find that every one of us would have opinions about styles and preferences. There might be some similarities but we would be hard pressed to find two people who could agree on everything related to music.

Composers like Bach and Handel brought to the Christian church a greater sense of music appreciation in their compositions the likes of which Christendom had not yet seen or heard, music which many enjoy today to the glory of God. But even they received their share of criticism.

In the 1700s Isaac Watts brought more contention when he challenged the established tradition of singing the Psalms by introducing man-made hymns that paraphrased Scripture. When King Henry VIII introduced the new prayer book he decreed that all services should be in English instead of Latin but they could only be sung with one note per syllable. Signing Angels We Have Heard On High with its Glooooria would have been anathema.

In the mid to late 1800's a Baptist preacher began to sing hymns in his church. A number of folks left to join the non-singing church. It took him 20 years before it was accepted.

In the 1900s some pioneering preachers like Donald Grey Barnhouse and Charles Fuller began to use the radio to preach and featured gospel music with accompaniment on their programs. Many Christians initially showed great skepticism.

On the heels of Woodstock and the rise of Rock and Roll came the Jesus movement led by musicians like Larry Norman, Keith Green, Barry McGuire, Andre Crouch. Many churches were up in arms by the style and form they used in their music with acoustic and electric guitars, and drums. Many considered it straight from the devil. My college banned anything that was contemporary Christian music in nature. Today many of those same churches sing some of the very songs they once so strongly opposed. For example:

Hymn #643 – O Lord, You're Beautiful – K. Green
Hymn #308 – There Is a Redeemer – Melody Green
Hymn #54 – My Tribute – Andre Crouch (#55)

In most cases it all boils down to personal preference. But folks, personal preferences can

become a wet blanket on our worship. Don't let personal preference stifle worship. **If we have a hard time singing a song because it's not the style we like is our heart really ready to worship?** I remember a service many years ago. The children's ministry had worked diligently on a song for the congregation. It had an upbeat tempo and the kids were snapping their fingers and one parent threw his hymnal on the pew and walked out. What a crushing blow to worship just because he didn't like it. It wasn't theologically wrong, too loud, not repetition. It had some tempo.

The fact is lots of things can rob us of worshipping God if we let them distract us from our focus on Him. **Can we put those things aside and truly focus on God as the center of our worship? If we can't then who are we really worshipping?** So let's talk about the work of worship in the present.

II. THE WORK OF WORSHIP IN THE PRESENT

Worship is thinking about God and having a celebration in your heart.

Let's begin here by turning to **Revelation 4** where we really see the heart of worship. This passage helps us to answer the who, what, where, when, why and how of worship. The scene is heaven and the central image of the scene is the throne and the One seated on it. We pick it up in the middle of **verse 8**.

Revelation 4:8b-11

The when of worship is day and night. Every day and any time it is appropriate to worship God. We gather as a corporate body of believers to worship each Sunday at 11, but this is saying it shouldn't be just one particular time. I look at our gathering for worship in two ways: it is the culmination of a week of individual worship as we come together to join our unique experience of worship from the week as we collectively coming into the presence of God expressing praise to Him for the past week. Our

gathering each Sunday also helps us prepare for our individual worship in the week ahead.

And there is something else we learn about the when of worship and that is it's not only day and night but it will last forever.

The who should be obvious. He is the Lord God Almighty who is seated on the throne. Those worshipping tell us that He has a holy nature, that He is eternal, having always existed in the past and will always exist in the future. That He is Almighty is another way of saying He is all powerful.

The why of worship we learn in **verse 11** is because He is worthy. He deserves it because of everything He has created and because of who He is. Worship is expressing His worth.

The how of worship is with the whole being – body, mind and spirit. Those worshipping here bow down and express praise through what they say. Worship is about being totally focused on God and who He is. That's what we learn from the example of these 4 living creatures and 24 elders.

When it comes to the true worship of God Pastor John Piper describes it as a valuing or treasuring of God above all things. That goes for how we sing and why we sing. Again, it's a matter of the heart.

Jesus summed it up in **Matthew 15:8-9** by saying that **"These people honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me; in vain do they worship Me."**

If we apply what Jesus said there to our worship through singing, then it doesn't matter whether the text we sing comes right out of Scripture or if it is from words about Scripture; it doesn't matter what era of music it came from; and it doesn't matter what instruments are being used – if our heart isn't right, then the stuff that's coming out the mouth is empty, hollow, worthless, without affect, futile. We read in both **Isaiah 1** and **Amos 5** that God detests ritualistic worship and hates the noise of songs and

the sound of harps if it's not with the right heart.

In **Revelation 4** we saw the essence of worship. In **Isaiah 6** we see the preparation for worship.

A. The Preparation For Worship – **Isaiah 6:1-8**

From **Matthew 15:8-9** we saw that the matter of the heart is all important in worship. True worship is the matter of the heart. I'm going to say this so forgive me if I step on some toes, but **if we can't sing because we may not like it then are we truly worshipping God with a right heart?** If we are absolutely and totally in love with God then the style should have no bearing on our worship. We will be immersed in the wonder and worship of God.

Let me read an excerpt from Kent Carlson's book *Renovation of the Church*. (Page 151, 152)

When we go away from a service and critique the worship, any part of it, then the experience is more about us and what we did or didn't get out of it, than it is about God who should be at the center. Now, that said, there are some things in the service that can be a hindrance to any worshipper and I, as your pastor, have the responsibility to ensure that what is done in each service brings us to the throne of God in worship. When it comes to music, it can either be performance music where the focus is on the musician or it can be worship music where the focus is on God. I will do my best to make sure it is both biblical and worshipful, but we must prepare by coming with the right heart.

That's why **Isaiah 6:1-8** is so important at helping see how we should prepare to worship God.

In this passage there are three things that I see that are part of Isaiah's preparation for worship.

1. Preparation of the head for worship – v. 5

In a vision Isaiah was brought into the presence of God. God was seated on His throne that hovered over the Temple. We know that because it says He

was high and exalted. It's not just His person that is high and exalted, but positionally He is above the Temple. We also know this because the train or hem of His robe filled the Temple. It flowed down from where He was seated on the throne and covered the area of the Temple so that those who entered the Temple to worship were underneath His throne. This shows us that the rightful place of God is to be exalted above us. He is over us and worthy of all worship. It's a similar scene to what we read in Revelation 4. They are all praising God speaking about His omnipotence, holiness, and splendor. The sound of their praise shook the Temple. Right then in the middle of their worship Isaiah has an aha moment about himself. He realizes he is in the presence of a holy God and he shouldn't be there. It is here that he prepares his head. In comparison to God's holiness he's filthy. Recognizing it he cries out in repentance. It's like the tax collector asking God to have mercy on him.

David described it in **Psalm 51:17** as having a broken and contrite heart. Or in **Psalm 139:29-30** when he invited God to **“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way of everlasting.”**

Paul essentially says the same in **I Corinthians 11:28** when he exhorts us to examine our life so that in the act of worship through communion we don't take it in an unworthy manner. Prepare the head through repentance.

Isaiah prepared his head through confession. He relished being in God's presence, but realized that in his current condition he had no business being there. So folks, when it comes to worship, when it comes to uniting our hearts in singing, make sure you prepare the head, by recognizing that need to repent before we come into the presence of a holy God. Simultaneously we see that in preparing the head for worship he was preparing the heart.

2. Preparation of the heart for worship – v. 6-7

At the moment of his confession, one of the seraphs took a live coal and touched his tongue symbolizing that he was forgiven and could now be in God's presence. In **Leviticus 16:12** we read that a live coal was taken into the Holy of holies on the Day of Atonement when the sacrifice was made for sin. This coal symbolized a purifying fire. If our heart is not prepared then everything we think we are doing in worship is seen by God as meaningless. He calls them evil deeds and He invites us to make ourselves clean through His purifying work.

After he prepared his head and his heart then his hands were prepared.

3. Preparation of the hands for worship – v. 8

Only when our head and heart are prepared for worship will our hands be prepared to worship. A right worship attitude will always lead to right worship actions. That's what Paul says in **Romans 12:1**. When we give ourselves wholly to God as a living sacrifice, willing to do His will versus our own, our worship is accepted and we are then willing to worship Him further through acts of service which demonstrates a right heart with God. If our heart isn't right in worship, then our actions won't be right in worship either.

A.W. Tozer wrote that "God is trying to call us back to that for which He created us, to worship Him and enjoy Him forever."

How we worship is a witness and that's the point I end with today.

III. THE WITNESS OF WORSHIP IN OUR PROCLAMATION – Psalm 40:3

Charles Spurgeon once called his music ministry a "war department" because there was so much contention. It doesn't have to nor should it be that way. No we aren't all going to agree on the style of music based on our particular preferences, but how we worship is either a witness or a weakness in helping people put their trust in Christ.

A question to ask is this: can I immerse myself in the presence of God in spite of my own preference? The young worshipper who prefers one style can learn from the rich, staid theology of the older worshipper. The older worshipper who prefers another style can learn from the expressive freedom of the younger worshipper. Together we are called to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth (**John 4:24**). We are not called to be religious, but to be worshipful. It starts with the head and the heart and leads to the hands.

If you had lived during the time Silent Night was written, you would have heard the criticism of choir master George Weber who called it vulgar mischief void of all religious and Christian feelings.

Perhaps one of the greatest masterpieces is Handel's Messiah. It was condemned as vulgar theater by the clergy of his day. They thought it had too much repetition and not enough message. Hallelujah is repeated some 100 times.

The music being created today is receiving the same type of criticism. In 20 years it will be something else. Let's not add to the malaise, but sing joyfully in praise of our king through which we witness to the world.

Our worship must be an act of humility.

It must be an act of reverence.

It must be an act of repentance.

Worship engages the mind, the will, and emotions.

Evelyn Underhill described worship as "the total adoring response of man to One Eternal God."

Jubal made flutes and harps. Instruments have been used by the church to worship God. Music is like pasta, there are lots of options and we all have preferences. Sometimes we may be served what we may not prefer, but must put the preference aside and adore God together. It is, after all, about God. So let's make sure our heart is prepared.