

How many times had Isaiah, John worshipped a notry like the happened? This was unique. Rare. - I remember in collage - This kind of an encounter with God is a gift... it can't be manipulated with lights, candles, incense, special effects. Though we try... Nevertheless the Resurrection is present as he was in Palestine... *was*

The Maintenance of Divine Worship

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on January 18, 1992.
Scripture Lessons: Psalm 100, Isaiah 6:1-8; Revelation 1:9-18.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Nothing is more important for one who trusts in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior than worship. *Everything grows out of the authentic encounter - evangelism, social right-eousness* In worship we come to know that the the LORD who revealed himself to Isaiah is none other than the One who has come to us in Jesus Christ. In worship we recognize that God cannot be known apart from God's revelation of himself. In worship we come to know that God made us and that none of us is self made. We come to know that we belong to the God who gave himself to us in Jesus Christ. When I come to a worship service I want to meet God. I want to hear God. And yet there are so many obstacles that can get in the way of our seeing and hearing the God who has revealed himself in Christ. It's a miracle that this ever takes place.

When Pastor Ingqvist was in seminary, Garrison Keillor tells us, he was preparing for his first sermon as a student pastor in a small Lutheran church. Some fellow seminarians made a bet with him. "We'll give you ten dollars if you can name in your sermon the Biblical animal that we're thinking of." Now seminarians can be pretty irreverent at times, so Ingqvist agreed. His friends came that Sunday and sat in the back to hear Ingqvist preach. In his sermon he listed all the pairs of animals that came into the ark. He mentioned the rooster that crowed when Peter denied Jesus and the donkey on which Jesus rode on Palm Sunday. He mentioned the peacocks that were brought by the Queen of Sheba to

Solomon. He spoke of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah and the camels that brought the wise men to Jesus. And in all this he tried to draw out some spiritual lessons for the congregation while at the same time trying to win the bet. Every once in a while he'd look in the back of the sanctuary to see if he'd named the Biblical animal. He could see his friends stifling their laughter at his vain attempt to name the Biblical animal.

In the middle of this irreverent sermon, a distraught woman in the congregation began to cry out, "O Jesus! Save me Jesus!" She was crying. Now this isn't the type of the thing that usually takes place usually in a staid Lutheran worship service. She left her pew, came forward and knelt at the Communion Table crying, "O Jesus. Forgive me. Forgive me. Save me, Jesus. Save me!" And

All of a sudden Inggvist was overcome with shame and self-loathing. He'd been called by God to preach the Gospel but had turned the worship service into a carnival. But somehow the Holy Spirit broke through and touched this poor woman who so much needed to hear the gracious word of God. Filled with remorse, Inggvist interrupted his sermon, stepped out from behind the pulpit knelt beside the crying woman. All he could say was, "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

I guess what moved me so much when I first heard that story was how God can reach down and touch men and women and young people in worship despite all *circumstances - despite surroundings, hymns we don't like sometimes, sermons* the ~~obstacles that we can put in God's way.~~ *that don't move us - the baggage we bring with us*

Why is worship so important for me? Why do I keep coming week after week to a worship service? That question made me think of how, when I'm in the

Wilmington area I'll drive by the home my father built in Brookland Terrace, north of Prices Corner. Why do I do this? Why, after being away for 30 years do I keep going back? I guess because that home has become a sacred place. It was there that my dad and I would sit in front of the radio on Sunday night and listen to Edgar Bergen and Charley McCarthy. There my brother and sisters and their families would gather for Thanksgiving dinner and Christmas. And when I return I sense something of their presence.

The worship service is like that old home. In worship we gather with the family of God on earth and in heaven to meet with the God who has revealed himself in Christ. There've been times when I've encountered God in a powerful way in a worship service. It doesn't happen all the time. In fact our Scripture lessons imply that the vision of God Isaiah and John experienced were extraordinary events and not something that happened at every worship service.

Of course God is always present. God is always here as an unseen presence whom we worship and praise. The Risen Lord is here even when we don't see him or feel him or hear him addressing us personally. But sometimes the veil is lifted and the only words that can express what I have experienced is to say that I've seen God in the worship service. I've heard the Word of God address me personally in a powerful way, assuring me of pardon and calling me to rededicate myself to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. And I keep coming back in the hopes of this happening again. I come because I want to encounter the living God who has revealed himself in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. I need that encounter

to empower me to do what God calls me to do.

We might not see God like Isaiah did. We might not see the risen Christ like John did on the island of Patmos. But God is here this morning, high and lifted up and seated upon his heavenly throne. And the Risen Christ is here this morning, the one who has the keys to death and life, whose eyes are like a shining fire. There are times when the veil is lifted.