

Aiming to Worship God in Spirit & Truth

Vision - Part III

October 30, 2011

Read Scripture – John 4:1-16

Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know, we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”

John 4:21-24 (NIV)

This morning we are looking at the third element of our vision statement: *Aiming to worship God in Spirit and Truth*. While it is explicit in the third element of our vision statement, it is implied in the other four, we are always aiming. We never fully arrive during our time here on earth. That’s what makes us human. And just as last week when I talked about the three pillars that the church in S. Korea has built itself upon, as a three legged stool, take away one leg and the church won’t stand, each of the five elements of our vision statement are important. Take away one, and we are not the church who God calls us to be. But if there is one which is most important, it is worship. All the other elements are just an extension of our worship.

I don’t know if you have noticed but God often calls us to hold two truths together. Not just similar truths, but often two truths which seem to be polar opposites. Truths like faith and works, law and grace, judgment and mercy. In John 1:14 it says “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Galatians 6:2 says, “carry each other’s burdens.” Three verses later it reads, “all must carry their own loads.” So which is it? In Ephesians 2:8-9 the apostle Paul declares that faith alone is the source of salvation and that works has nothing to do with it, “so that no one can boast.” And then the apostle James (2:14-20) tells us that “faith without works is dead and useless - it can’t save.” So which is true? As Christians we are called to walk in the light of often holding what appears to be two opposites together, in tension.

In a recent editorial in the *Mennonite Weekly Review*, editor Paul Schrag wrote: “The body of Christ needs members who connect truths that exist in tension. We need to be able to find the higher truth that embraces both poles.” We often don’t do very good at that. In fact it is only by the grace of God in which we can walk with that tension. We usually tend to lean more towards one side than the other. In our Scripture this morning we are told by Jesus that true worshipers must worship the Father in Spirit and in truth.

One of the highlights for me of our Mission Trip to Haiti was our worship experience on the first Sunday morning. It was under a huge tent, because their church building had been damaged by the earthquake in Jan. 2010. I don’t know how many were attendance. It was in the hundreds, perhaps five hundred. A couple of things really stood out. One, for a people that seem to have so little. Most live in what we would refer to as huts, many with dirt floors, very little access to

clean water, and the majority wear clothes during the week that seem to have been handed down to them or have been worn by someone else previously. But come Sunday morning, all were dressed up. Many men in suits or at least dress shirt and tie, the women in dresses, all the children dressed up and clean. There were no jeans or shorts. They had come to worship their Lord & King. I was reminded of the words of a New Testament professor that I had in college, an African-American, who stated that in his tradition the belief is that there is no one to get more dressed up for than God on Sunday morning - the Lord's day. I must say, I don't think it is the clothes we wear which is that important to the worship service, but I do wonder if it is evidence of a more important issue - that just maybe we approach worship on Sunday morning with too casual of an attitude. Do we really come to worship our risen Savior and Lord Jesus Christ with everything we have?

The other thing that really stood out in the worship experience in Haiti was just the sense of the Holy Spirit's presence. The passion of the people that were present. The interesting thing, is that I couldn't even understand most of the words being said, and yet I could still sense God's presence. There was one point in which a woman got up to speak from the pulpit. Which seemed to be a little unusual because the Haitian culture is a very male dominated culture. But the woman had so much passion. I wasn't even sure what she was saying but I really felt convicted. I was just about to confess when the translator sitting nearby told me she was making the announcements for the week, and she was only up to Wednesday. Which made me think, maybe we need to spice up our announcements, get a little more passionate, because if I did understand what that woman was saying, there was no way I was not going to do what she was asking.

But the Spirit wasn't just evident during the announcement time, it was evident in all: the congregational singing, the special music, the reading of the Scripture, the message given in Creole and English, a special prayer time in which we were all invited to come up and lay hands on anyone who wanted to come forward, the offering time in which everyone had to come forward and place their offering in several baskets which were placed up front. And it was hot! I'm not sure I ever sweated that much during a worship service. But it was over before I knew it, 2 ½ hours later!

Which made me think, what are we missing? Why is it that a people who seem to have so little, at least financially, can come together and worship God with so much passion and thankfulness, and we in this country who have so much just take worship for granted? Somewhere along the way we have lost the focus of what worship is really all about. We don't really aim to worship God in Spirit and Truth, we aim to worship/please ourselves. Yes, that video clip this morning is funny, but in real humor, truth is always present. We aim for the perfect worship service. God isn't looking for the perfect worship service. He's looking for a people who will give up everything about themselves to worship Him:

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Psalm 51:15-17 (NIV)

What does it really mean to worship God in Spirit and truth? And if those two elements are two different polarities, how do we hold them together? Might we favor one more than the other? And I would like to suggest that just maybe we favor truth more than Spirit.

Truth was an important element of the early church, that which we looked at last week in the Book of Acts:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer . . . Acts 2:42

The early church spent lots of time making sure that they had the truth right. Most importantly the truth that God had sent His Son, Jesus Christ, for the redemption of all mankind, Jews and Gentiles alike, for all who believe in Him. The early church had lots of truth, but they also had lots of Spirit. And Spirit is not something that we can create or make come. The only thing we can do is open ourselves up to its presence.

Jesus words to his early followers:

"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." . . . He said to them: It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:4-8 (NIV)

While we can't make the Holy Spirit come, we can create opportunities to experience His presence. Two very important ways to help us experience the Holy Spirit's presence: Preparation and Anticipation.

First, preparation is most important. Since we have shortened our services from an 1 1/4 hours to an hour, some have suggested that we are limiting the Holy Spirit's potential. To that I would say, if the Holy Spirit wasn't experienced in an hour and fifteen minutes, he isn't going to be experienced in an hour. And if he was experienced in an hour and fifteen minutes, he will be experienced in an hour. The key is, do we come expectant to experience his presence? How important is the prelude time? If we come rushing in, focus on socializing with everyone around us, never really settle our hearts, then there is a very good chance that we are going to leave and never have experienced His presence. But if we make a concentrated effort to slow ourselves down, to leave our cell phones & calendars behind, and prepare our hearts to meet our risen Savior & Lord Jesus Christ through His Spirit, then I believe that more often than not, we will leave having experienced His presence.

Second, anticipate that you are going to experience the Holy Spirit in every aspect of the service. Well, I still wonder about the announcements;) But God's presence can be experienced in His Word, the Scripture, whenever it is read, whether it be in the Call to Worship or before the message or at other times during the service.

His presence can be experienced in the congregational singing and the special music. His presence can be experienced in the sermon, the offering, the testimony time, during the prayers. His presence can be experienced in every aspect of the service if we open ourselves to it.

Recognizing that there is truth in many paradoxes and that we often need to hold them together in tension, worship is what we do on Sunday's and it is what we do the other six days of the week. Sunday is the opportunity that God has given us to worship Him collectively as the body of Christ, not only here at Oak Grove, but in every church and in every Christian denomination throughout the world. As I wrote in this month's edition of *Oak Leaves*, the highlight of the trip to Haiti for me was that people can come together, from many different churches and denominations, and put aside whatever differences they might have and be able to accomplish so much for the glory of God. That's what it really means to be the church! Yes, worship is what we do on Sunday's but it is also what we do the rest of the week:

Therefore, in view of God's great mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Romans 12:1 (NIV)

That's where the "testimony time" is important. God isn't just working on Sunday's when we gather to worship Him collectively, He's working 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and the testimony time gives us the opportunity to testify to his presence. "You will be my witnesses, first in Jerusalem, then in Judea and Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth."

The story of the Samaritan woman at the well is designed to show us that worship doesn't just take place on the Sabbath (Sat. for Jews & Sun. for Christians), but also during the week. Worship occurs in the midst of a broken world – adultery, hunger & thirst, and racial conflict. And that God often seeks worship from the least likely, in this case a Samaritan woman caught in the act of adultery, not once, but at least five times. The truth is out! And it feels so good for the woman, because Jesus does not condemn her:

*For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict (**this is the truth!**) Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light, because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his/her deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.* John 3:17-21

Jesus was saying that there is a wrong way to worship and there is a right way. First he says, it is not the *where* which is important. "It is not this mountain, it is not Jerusalem which is important." It is the *what, how and whom* which is important. "You (meaning the Samaritans) worship what you do not know." The Samaritans were really a sect which broke off from the Jews. They were mostly a mixed breed. They disregarded all the O.T. with the exception of their own version of the first five books. Essentially they worshiped a God who fit their own needs.

But the Jews, they worshiped what they knew, for salvation is from the Jews. Jesus, the Messiah, was from the Jews. But most of the Jews would not come to worship in Spirit and truth either, because they would come to reject the truth, the truth being Jesus himself.

How and whom are the most crucial to worship. “Worship must be vital and real in the heart, and worship must rest on a true perception of God” (John Piper, Desiring God, p. 81). There must be spirit and there must be truth. Jesus says, “the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship in spirit and truth.” Those two words *spirit* and *truth* correspond to the *how* and *whom* of worship. Worship must have heart and head. Worship must engage the emotions and thought.

Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, before her heart was enlightened by God, “If you (only) knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

The living water that Jesus gives is the Holy Spirit. The water offered to the Samaritan adulteress was the Word of truth, and the power of the Spirit. For those who have traveled to a third world country, on a mission trip or for some other reason, the one thing that really stands out, is just how scarce and how precious living water really is. Something that we take for granted so much in this country. So much that we just waste, flush down the drain. Jesus offers us “living water” which too is precious. It is the only thing that quenches our thirst and feeds our hunger.