

The 3 C's

1. Communion – meeting with God

Introduction

Having launched into the year proper, and today being our AGM, the election of a new Parish Council, the launch of many of our groups and ministries, I thought it appropriate to spend some time thinking about our priorities as a church.

Over the next 3 weeks I intend to revisit our vision statement, to work through each of the 3 C's, to focus in particular on some of the *core values* behind them, the dot points (if you like) under the main headings.

Today we begin with **Communion**, the first C, with *worship*, meeting with God.

A couple of years ago in synod, Bp George was reflecting on the uniqueness of the church. *'We do many things in our work and life as a church,'* he said, *'we are concerned with education at all levels, with looking after the needy, with aged care and hospitals, with matters of social policy and politics, with unemployment and housing. We are caught up in many partnerships and organisations beyond our own borders as we pursue these things. All this is important and needs to be nurtured,'* he said. *'But I believe that our core business is the building of local faith communities, [c's] which nurture the life of the Spirit in prayer, worship, forgiveness, hope and mission. Other groups and individuals in our society are also concerned with education, social security, housing, care [and so on...] but no other group is going to put energy and resources into the worship of the triune God, into the proclamation of Christ, into the discipline of prayer and praise, and the nurture of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.*

This is our task, he said, 'ours alone... If we don't do it, it will not be done'...

He's right, isn't he?

Worship ... meeting with God ...

It's our privilege, our *joy*, our deepest calling to *exalt* the name, to *uphold* the honour,

to *voice* the praise of the God who in Jesus has redeemed us for loving communion.

It's the one thing no one else will do. *We* must, for it's the most important thing of all!

'Sing to the Lord a new song...

*For **great** is the Lord and **most worthy** of praise;*

...bring an offering and come into his courts.

***Worship** the Lord in the splendour of his holiness...' (Ps 96)*

'Come...let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him in music and song...

Come let us bow down in worship' (Ps 95)

Friends, this is our primary calling – the worship of the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

At St George's worship is, always will be, the *foundation* of all we do.

Here this morning I call you to a deeper, richer, more wholehearted commitment to worship.

Of the core values listed in the bulletin it's the first I want to focus on today.

'As a church, we seek to honour God in our times of corporate worship.'

It's simple, isn't it? I'm sure we all assent, but tell me, what does it mean...?

What does it mean for you...?

How do we do it...?

Some say,

'Well it's simple, to honour God in worship means to turn up regularly,

to turn up on time,

it means to sing loudly,

to listen attentively, give generously,

to care and encourage and welcome with warmth and compassion.'

Well, these things *are* important, but is this all?

Is it simple a matter of behaviour,

or is there something else?

Sure, it may be dishonouring to arrive late regularly,

but for some, I know, just *getting here* is an achievement.

You parents with young children,

you battle the whole service to keep things calm, you find it hard to concentrate

have you worshipped? Have you honoured God...?

I think you have.

Your determination to *be* here, to *bring* your children, honours God.

I guess in the end, it's *attitude* that really counts.

Yes, behaviour *is* important, what we *do* in worship matters,

but as Jesus pointed out to those Pharisees with their impeccable worship manners,

(much to their annoyance)

the Lord looks at the *heart*.

Honouring God in worship begins with your inner desire and motivation.
If the heart is right, then behaviour honours.
If we're *half hearted*,
if we're *hard hearted*,
then even if the behaviour is impeccable the Lord is not honoured.

So, how is it with you ...?

How do you approach times of corporate worship...?

Does your behaviour reflect a desire to honour God...?

If it does, then don't worry about rules, expectations, rolling eyes,
just go for it, the best way you can.
Give it to God,
that's what matters – the honour, the glory, the worth of God...

Well that's the core, the basic principle.

In the time remaining, a few tips for staying fresh in worship, for going deeper and richer.

1. Pray and prepare.

If worship is as important as I've said, then clearly it's worth preparing for.
Now I know many have been **preparing for today**;
there was a beautiful little team in here yesterday, for eg, preparing the space, cleaning,
setting the table.
Others have prepared music, liturgy, prayers, readings.
Pam prepared the bulletin, the rosters.
Long before us people prepared the prayer book, the preacher, the building...
All this is important, honouring to God,
you may care to join one of the teams.
I hope you will.

Hopefully *all* of us have been **praying** for the service.
Praying for the preacher, the muso(s);
for the people to be present and willing, open and receptive.

Can I ask, are there any who did spend time praying for today?

Can you imagine if we *all* did this? What a difference it would make...!

Then there's the other dimension to preparation, **the preparation of ourselves**.
This of course, is more than simply getting here,
it's about *preparing our hearts* –
it's about arriving with a sense of awe and expectancy.
Remember, it's *God* we meet in worship – it's not just a service, it's a *meeting*,
we *meet* with the Lord Jesus, with the King of the Universe,

it's a meeting the angels and archangels wouldn't miss.
At this meeting we hear his word, we share his sacrament, we encounter his Spirit.

When you gather for worship expect to engage him, to be found by him.
Remember, *God is seeking* true worshippers.

When people offer their best in worship, they gather with a sense of '*holy expectancy.*'

With the early church that's how it was.
When they gathered they knew they were entering the very Holy of Holies,
in X, the barrier between heaven and earth had been removed,
the veil in the Temple had ripped in two.
They were expectant, and at times, the very building shook with the power of God.

Just think of the difference expectancy makes...
God is honoured when we are expectant ...

2. Come to give

Worship is about giving.
If you desire to honour God then come *to give yourself wholeheartedly* – to God,
to one another.

Watch the consumer attitude.
You know: *What's in it for me?*
How will this meet my needs?

Let me say as clearly as I can, we don't worship to get,
that's idolatry, that's what the world does,
it worships in order to manipulate the gods.
We don't do that, God *knows* our needs,
we worship to give.
That's what worship is, *giving God his worth!*

In Xn worship, God is both subject *and* object.
In Xn worship our chief aim is to *give God* pleasure.

In the OT, the centrality of the sacrificial system left it in no doubt.
Though expressed differently in the NT, *offering* remains the central activity of worship.
Sadly, at some point says Gaddy, '*People began attending... to receive a blessing rather than
make an offering.*' (Gaddy)

Linked to this is the whole trap of being a spectator, rather than a participant.
If the music appeals, if the preaching entertains, if the service finishes on time,
then we're happy, if not, well, then we complain.
This is *not* an excuse for shoddy music or preaching,
still, we need to watch the consumer/spectator mentality...

To some degree we *can* compare worship to theatre,
the key, as Kierkegaard so wisely stressed, is getting the parts right.

'Whereas many worship services allow congregations to be an audience viewing the pastor and musicians as actors, genuine worship happens when everyone knows that God is the audience.' (M. Dawn p. 82)

Musos, services leaders, intercessors, they are the prompts, the coaches, the stage managers. The actors, well it's us! You and me, *we* are the actors and all our acts are directed to God.

Of course, we act only because *he* acted first!

So, worship is about God, we come to give.

Whatever we're doing – singing, praying, listening, reciting, offering, thinking, questioning, I encourage you, do it all to the glory of God. Wholeheartedly.

Next, and this is going to seem contradictory,

3. Be willing to receive.

Whatever God has for you.

It's actually *not* a contradiction, we worship *to give*, that's our motive, but God is gracious, overflowing with kindness and compassion.

As you give yourself *to* God you cannot help but receive.

I mean when you align earth with heaven, that's what happens, God's goodness flows.

So, whatever God has for you, receive it gratefully, humbly.

Don't be jealous of others, receive what he has for you.

And finally, when people offer their best in worship, they offer

4. The worship of obedience.

The praise of their daily lives.

If our worship is to honour God, then it will spill over into the rest of the week.

It will influence the way we treat our loved ones,

those who are difficult,

it will influence our values, our goals and behaviour and priorities.

With God's help we seek to live consistent with our worship.

How we live on Monday will be as important as how we sing on Sunday.

Conclusion.

We seek to honour God in our times of corporate worship.

It's a core value of this church, it's a goal we set for ourselves every time we gather, to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength...