

Cybercolumn by Berry D. Simpson: Worship_41805

April 12, 2005

Posted: 4/12/05

CYBERCOLUMN: Worship

By Berry D. Simpson

Erwin McManus wrote about a worship service in his Los Angeles church when he decided to explain the gospel by painting one of his friends in five different colors. When I read that, I had two questions: (1) how would this communicate the gospel, and (2) did his friend know what was going to happen to him when he agreed to help with the service? ("Hey, why don't you help me with church tomorrow morning ... and wear old clothes!")

However, McManus has spoken to my life through his books to the degree I have to take everything he writes as valuable and just wait for my own understanding. And in fact, the person-painting worked. A young Japanese college student, who had been attending Mosaic (the church) out of curiosity, told McManus that while he spoke English too fast to understand everything, the human art made the message absolutely clear: "Jesus is alive."

Berry D.
Simpson

Worship is one of the things we Christians talk about a lot. Everyone has a definite style and taste in mind when they think about worship, and we

usually refer to music, sometimes teaching and preaching, when we talk about it.

One recent Wednesday night, I was fortunate to attend a worship service at Faith Temple Church of God in Christ. I was there on official duty. They were celebrating the opening night of the statewide convention of their women's organization, and I was there to give an official welcome to the city of Midland and to read a proclamation from the mayor. By the way: I was the only Anglo in room. I wasn't nervous about that as long as they didn't put me up on the deacon's bench in front of everyone, because when that happens, which it has, I feel like Steve Martin in *The Jerk*, trying to move with the music. Not very good.

This time, however, I was in a pew near the front beside my friend Tommy. (He introduced me to one of his friends, calling me a "bootleg preacher." I kind of liked that. I think I'll add it to my resume.) My goal for the evening was simple—don't embarrass Tommy in front of his grandmother, one of the speakers for the convention.

When we first walked into the sanctuary, one lady was praying while another stood beside her and sang background, accompanied by an occasional organ riff. The prayer was quite bold and aggressive, and eventually morphed into congregational singing. It was great. This was a full-body experience. There were no spectators. When one person prayed, everyone prayed. When one person spoke, everyone spoke. This was truly community worship.

There are so many ways to worship God, but most of us fall into predictable patterns and rituals because habits are so much easier. I'm afraid I've spent a large portion of my life doing the same thing over and over, calling it worship, whether or not I communed with God. Habits are just too easy.

I often attend a community worship service that uses a standard liturgy. At

first I was leery of this. Why would I want to stand up and read a bunch of words written by some other guy a long time ago? Doesn't the Bible warn against mindless repetitions? But I have learned to appreciate and value this form of worship. We're supposed to worship in spirit and in truth, and spontaneity is not a requirement for either. I have learned to worship God while reading someone else's words along with hundreds of other worshippers who are doing the same thing.

I must say, though, that my most meaningful worship experiences have been in solitude and very quiet. While I enjoy vibrant group praise and worship for the sense of community and joy it brings, I don't commune with God while singing choruses and clapping my hands. I need to be quiet. But that's just me.

I must say that while I was thinking about writing this essay, and thinking about worship, I got a phone call from my wife, Cyndi. She'd just returned home after running to discover the hot-water heater blowing water all over the floor of our house. She recruited our neighbor Jay to turn off the water and called me with the sad news.

My first thought was, "Well, so much for worship; now I need to worry about plumbing." But then I realized that if worship is our life and if worship is going to be meaningful, it has to have room for an occasional water leak. God loves us and wants to speak to us, even when the water is running rivers down the hall. We just have to learn how to open our ears and our hearts and listen and learn.

Berry Simpson, a Sunday School teacher at First Baptist Church in Midland, is a petroleum engineer, writer, runner and member of the city council in Midland.

in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.