

You see, the Biblical understanding of worship is we are all here to praise God from the bottom of our hearts. Worship is more about what is going on inside of ourselves. The minister, the choir, the hymns we sing, special music are all to help us worship.

The central character in this week's text is Isaiah, whose call to be a prophet came during an annual celebration of worship in the temple. It was for him an encounter with God so profound that afterward he could no longer see himself or his people in quite the same way.

To Isaiah it seemed that the entire building shook with the presence of God. Have you ever wondered about the others who were present during that same worship service?

Did they have a similar experience to Isaiah? Did this act of worship affect how they viewed themselves? How they viewed God? How is it that two people can hear the same music, the same prayers, the same sermon, and one of them be utterly transformed by the experience, while the other is unmoved? What makes the service of worship a profound encounter with God for one and a routine ritual for another?

The answer appears in a moment Isaiah describes in today's text, a moment when, as songs are being sung, prayers are being prayed, the high priest is intoning the greatness of God, unexpectedly, worship happens for Isaiah.

During routine worship, Isaiah received a vision of God that he had never encountered in all those worship services he had been in before this time. Isaiah was engaged in an ordinary service of worship, seeing what everyone else saw, hearing what everyone else heard, when God broke into the ordinary to reveal himself to Isaiah like never before. Isaiah "saw through" the smoke and the

haze of the Enthronement Celebration to eternal God to whom this service of worship pointed.

Now, we won't all experience what Isaiah experienced every Sunday. Some Sundays, we will faithfully come to worship and be encouraged, taught, directed by the words of the hymns, the Scripture, by the choir, by the prayers and by the sermon. We will get the inclination that all that is done in this place points to God and God's presence in our lives.

Other times, a point in the sermon, a scripture passage, a song, a prayer will deeply touch our lives. We will be touched in a way that we will see beyond the acts of worship to the God whom we worship and praise.

The form of worship is here every Sunday, we need to ask ourselves, "Are we coming to worship, open to the God behind those forms?" We can manufacture a radical experience of God, but we are much more likely to experience God when we are open to experiencing God.

Sometimes, we might be afraid of what will happen if I experience God personally in the worship service. What will God ask me to do or change? Isaiah's experience reminds us that God does not reveal himself simply to overwhelm us or to make us feel worthless. Quite the contrary, God reveals himself to us to help us to know how special we are, and that we are called into a special relationship with God for a special purpose.

It is important to note that God's question, "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?" was not directed to Isaiah, but rather to the attending Seraphim. Isaiah simply overheard the question and stepped forward.

What prompted Isaiah to volunteer even before he knew what God was asking him to do? Gratitude! Gratitude for God's grace—for God's forgiveness of sin. Gratitude for the experience of God's presence unlike anything he had known before. Gratitude that issues forth in positive actions in the lives of God's people and in the expressing of gratitude, worship happens.

I encourage us all before every worship service to offer a personal prayer: "O God, may I not only experience the forms of worship today, but may I experience You in worship today." As we celebrate the Holy act of communion today, my prayer for all of us is to experience God in our worship.

## **Come to Worship and Leave to Serve**

**Rev. Ed Morgan**

**Sunday, August 7, 2016**

**The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN**

**Isaiah 6:1-8; John 3:1-17**

Soren Kirkegaard is one of my favorite philosophers. Perhaps it is because he is a Christian and maybe because I can understand him. In much of his writing, he challenges us to ask the question, "What is worship?" What is Christian worship? We might ask ourselves, "Is the ritual of worship, is what the minister does worship, is what the choir does worship or is there something more to Christian worship?"

To help us in answering these questions, let me share one of Kirkegaard's illustrations that I believe really turns worship upside down from our normal way of thinking and acting. It is called, "Kirkegaard's Theater of Worship."

In Kirkegaard's Theater of Worship, imagine that you are in a theater when we are in worship. Where would the traditional participants in worship be situated? Well, if we think of worship the way we normally do it, we would say: The minister, the choir and organist are on the stage. The people are in the seats and God off somewhere looking on. But does this arrangement portray what worship is all about?

In Kirkegaard's Theater of Worship, the congregation is seated on stage, the choir, the minister, organist, praise band are all off to the side and acting as coaches. God is in the pews—seated in the audience—God is the audience.