



ST. JOHN'S CHURCH

SAVANNAH

Worship in the Anglican Tradition

Ministry with Youth - How Do I Become Fully Human?

The fourth pillar of ministry for the Youth of St. John's is worship.

Worship: Gotta Serve Somebody

I remember once listening to the radio as a college student and the D.J. said, "I'm not really religious." I thought this was ironic. The irony, you see, is that he had just been talking about sex, drugs, and rock n' roll with the same excitement a Christian would use to describe the Holy Communion. Everybody is religious, whether they know it or not. (*David Svihel, Minister with Youth*)

"You might like to eat caviar, you might like to eat bread. You may be sleeping on the floor, sleeping in a king-sized bed. But you're gonna have to serve somebody." Dylan's lyrics point out the lie that some people are not religious. We all serve somebody or something to which we give religious devotion. Another word to describe this service or devotion is worship.

You Become What You Worship

In his powerful book *We Become What We Worship* Greg Beale argues: "What people revere, they resemble, either for ruin or for restoration." The psalmist vividly describes this process in Psalm 115: Their idols are silver and gold, even the work of men's hands. They have mouths, and speak not; eyes have they, and see not. They have ears, and hear not; noses have they, and smell not. They have hands, and handle not; feet have they, and walk not; neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; and so are all such as put their trust in them.

It is easy to dismiss this as an outdated problem. We are Christians. We do not have gold statues of pagan deities set up in our living rooms! That is probably true, but we are still tempted to worship idols. Those idols of silver and gold ultimately represented the false gods we still worship today: money, sex, success, pleasure, and power.

What is so sad is that we often believe our idols can give us what they promise: happiness and life. Psalm 115 describes the dehumanizing effect of worshipping the wrong thing. Instead of leading to life and freedom, idols give us the only thing they can offer, spiritual blindness and death. The most dramatic example of this is addiction, where the idol progressively gives less and less and takes more and more.

Serve the Living God

The Bible often warns against worshipping idols. It is so easy to view warnings against sin and idolatry as the demands of a divine killjoy, but they are meant to wake us up to what is most important.

St. Paul writes to the Thessalonians, your faith in God has gone forth everywhere...how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. The only deliverance from death and source of life is the living God.

The goal of worship is to help us continually turn from idols – false gods like: money, sex, and power – to serve the true God and find life in him. For instance, being reminded every Ash Wednesday that we are dust puts things in perspective. We need to be reminded regularly that we are going to die (as melancholy as that sounds) so that we can acknowledge our limits and turn to the only one who can give us rest for our souls: Jesus.

Youth Formation through Worship

Our hope of making youth faithful worshippers of Jesus will not come through trying to out-hype or out-entertain popular culture, but through faithful Christian worship.

Jamie Smith describes the formative power of worship, “In my experience, many young people are intensely ritual animals without realizing it. And when they are introduced to habit-forming practices of Christian faith, invited into ways of following Jesus that are ancient and tested, their faith is given a second life... Regimens of devotion like [daily Morning and Evening Prayer] provide grooves for their faith to gear into, a tangible, historic way to align their desires with the grain of the universe.”

Far from making us too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good, worship puts all of life in its proper place. It reorders our loves, our virtues, and our priorities. C.S. Lewis once said, “Aim at Heaven and you will get Earth 'thrown in': aim at Earth and you will get neither.” The goal of worship is to help us aim at Heaven, so we can enjoy Earth as a gift of God rather than an idol to which we are enslaved.

The ultimate goal of the Youth of St. John's, and by extension God's ultimate goal for humanity, is to become fully human by finding the eternal life only available in Jesus Christ. By worshipping Jesus, we become like him. God makes worshippers through the gospel, hospitality, and the formation of virtue. Thanks be to God!