

Uncovering One MORE Way

My first response to what have been called the “worship wars” is fatigue and regret. Does the question of how we turn to and honor God have to be characterized by the same incessant fighting and one-upmanship that we see at every turn?

After all, this shouldn't be about “us.” **First and foremost worship is about the Lord of Life, how we bow down in obedience, how we rise up in gratitude, how we pray, remember, receive, experience the Holy Spirit, and join with the community of believers in dedicating our lives to service and witness as disciples of Jesus Christ.**

I was recently part of a group that spent several days working together. Each session began with a time of guided, prayerful silence. We read Scripture and we prayed without talking. We were reminded of teachings from our tradition, and heard anew about God's justice and mercy, and we contemplated without speaking. At the end of two days, a vibrant young member of our group who leads urban young adults in worship that is punctuated with recitations of poetry and the pulsating beat of postmodern tunes, turned to the elderly, mid-western, farmer/pastor who led our extended times of silence and said, “Wow! I had no idea how powerful and transforming silence could be as a way to worship. We are going to learn how to experience it as a part of our practices in my congregation.”

This was not a moment of triumph for traditional worship at the expense of contemporary forms. Rather, because he experienced a marvelous unexpected blessing, our friend from the city drew a larger circle of possibility for ways to deepen the encounter with the mystery and majesty of God. Wouldn't it be wonderful if, instead of insisting that we've fashioned “the best” or “most faithful” way to worship the One who gives us life, we would rejoice in uncovering yet one more authentic way to be in God's presence and return praise and thanksgiving?

Rigorous, principled, informed, and prayerful consideration about how to shape and lead worship faithful to our tradition is surely an important expectation for all who are called to this sacred work. But perhaps a dose of humility and a spirit of hospitality and curiosity in considering additional formulas, styles, and settings could help us draw circles with boundaries expansive enough to give us room to stretch and be surprised by the power and magnitude of God's love.



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