

"Today's Innovation...Tomorrow's Tradition"

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First Congregational UCC, Gaylord, MI

Texts: Acts 2: 41-47 and Colossians 3: 12-17

Worship...or should we call it "warship"? Over the bulk of my ministry, there have been a lot of wars about worship. I think they were even at one point called the "worship wars". Most of the arguments were about music. Some were about style. All of them were about change. The church was declining, which it still is, and worship was seen as the bullseye of the problem. Or at least that is the way it was presented. I remember we tried a "Blue Jean Worship" in one church I served, which was not about praising blue jeans, but it was about having a weeknight service, with different kinds of music, with less formal dress. It met with limited success. I led a new church start, in large part trying different music and informality in worship. It, too, met with limited success. In another church, we had a praise service, with all the praise music that is popular today. The irony there is that the praise service became more rigid than the so-called traditional service. While new and different things were tried in the traditional service, the praise service was virtually the same every week just rotating the same few songs. Multiple services have been the rage for years, and when I started in ministry,

extreme submission". Still others say, not a strict definition, but "true worship, in other words, is defined by the priority we place on who God is in our lives and where God is on our list of priorities." I learned in seminary, "worship is how we give worth to God." There's some definitions, but I'm not sure we solved the problem!

The problem lies in what it means to honor God. Some believe that our dress in church matters to God. Others say, "come as you are", with most churches just plain confused. Some believe that so-called "traditional" hymns, most of which originated after 1500 in our tradition, and some came even later from popular musicians like Fanny Crosby, who wrote some 9000 hymns, including "Blessed Assurance" and old-time favorite, really written in the 1870s. Ever wonder what people sang before then? Or before Luther wrote "A Mighty Fortress is Our God"? I bet you didn't know that the leader of the Salvation Army near the year 1900 wrote that secular music ought to be used in the church, writing, "Why should the devil have the best music?" Did you know that at one point in church history today's beloved organ was thought to be the devil's bagpipes? It was "fake" sound, rather than real, live instruments. Again, today's innovation is tomorrow's tradition.

four without any direction about how we do these things. That's where creativity is called for! Here they are: 1) [Worship includes] the teaching of the original disciples, whom we now call apostles. [We learn from them] the words of Jesus, the stories of Jesus, the parables he told, the character he embodied, so we can walk the road he walked. 2) Worship includes the breaking the bread and drinking the wine as Jesus taught us. Everywhere in our society, we experience constant divisions between rich and poor, slave and free, male and female, Jew and Greek, city-born and country-born, and so on. **But at the Lord's table** (*emphasis mine*) just as it was when Jesus shared a table with sinners and outcasts, we are all one, all loved, all welcome as equals. 3) Fellowship and sharing. We share our experiences, our sense of what God wants to tell us, our insights from the Scriptures. We also share our fears, our tears, our failures, and our joys. There is a financial aspect as well...none of us are rich, but through our sharing none of us are in need, either. And 4) Prayer. Some of our prayers are requests. We constantly pray for boldness and wisdom...we bring the needs and sorrows of others to God, too, joining our compassion with God's great compassion. We pray for everyone in authority. We pray (get this one) especially for those who consider themselves our enemies. The more they curse and

may only have been so for a generation. All I'm calling for is for Christians to expand our horizons, while sticking to the basics. Not everything we try will work to bring us closer to God, but God will use anything to get close to us. All of creation sings in praise to the Lord.

Praise be to God; however it happens...

In the many blessed names of God. Amen.