

Sermon 2010 Epiphany 5
Text: I Corinthians 14:12b-20
Theme: "What's In It for Me?"

After 25 years of teaching youth about worship, I have heard that it is boring 1,287,398 times, and I only counted the ones who said it with a big sigh and a good eye roll. I have heard from a smaller number of adults over the years that they don't really get anything out of it. That is usually the excuse for so-called "contemporary" worship. I say "so-called" because there is nothing non-contemporary about any good worship. All good worship is contemporary because it deals with sin and hurt and sorrow over sin. And all good worship proclaims the truth of the Resurrection and Jesus' victory over sin for us. Worship is not traditional or contemporary. It is either bad or good. If it is the song of God's people centered in Christ and the proclamation of Law and Gospel, it is good. If it is performance for entertainment purposes, centered in me and my worldly issues, it is bad. Sadly, in an effort to help people "get something out of worship," many churches are entertaining their people along a path that does not

lead to spiritual growth and so does not strengthen their grasp of salvation.

Here's a thought. What if the purpose of worship is not to entertain us? In fact, what if the purpose of worship is not for us to get anything at all, but rather to give? Now I'm not saying that we don't get anything from worship, but I'm talking about the entertainment mindset that many people have. If I am looking for entertainment value, this is not the place to be; unless, of course the acolytes have a really bad day or Mary and I get on separate pages and then, granted, it can be pretty entertaining around here.

On the other hand, if I come into this place not to get something but to serve; my mindset is totally different. Liturgy comes from the Greek word that means public service. We come here first to serve God with our offerings, our actions and our words; second to serve one another with our prayers, our concern and our encouragement; and last of all to serve ourselves. Listen again to St. Paul.

“So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.”

St. Paul encourages us today to grow up in our faith. We are not a bunch of little children needing to be entertained and coddled with ilk and cookies but rather the family of God who has come together to bring glory to the one who has given us life and salvation. We are ready for meat and potatoes. Like he touched Isaiah’s lips with a burning coal, so has God washed us in the waters of Baptism. Whatever our failures and faults, and we all have them, we are a holy nation, a people belonging to God. We are a purified people whose sins are washed away and we have come here to serve God.

So we are faced with being told that we must be entertained and entertaining. We scramble to find some new thing to fill the pews each week. We need to keep the little kids happy with activity bags, the youth happy with amazing video and cool audio, the boomers happy with drums and electric guitars and the seniors happy with “Beautiful Savior” and “How Great Thou Art.” The sermons have to be relevant and preferably tell us how to do

something useful. The seats have to be comfy, the coffee hot and the doughnuts fresh. The Pastor is less like the father of the family and more like a cross between a C.E.O. and an activity director on a cruise ship. And St. Paul says, GROW UP.

This is not about you and what you get out of it. This is not about entertaining you. This is not your personal therapy group. This is a holy space. A reverent space. A space set aside by God for us to bring our worship, our praise, our offerings, our song, our prayers. This is the space in which the family gathers to join hearts, hands and voices to praise our God.

Now, in doing this, if we pay attention, if we are focused on serving God, will we hear his voice? I guarantee it. Will we find comfort in His Word? Absolutely! Can he, our gracious and loving Father resist giving his children gifts – no he cannot and so even as we come to serve him, he invites us to come dine with him, to in fact dine on him, to literally receive our spiritual nourishment from his true body and blood that was given to save us.

Peter thought he knew how to fish. But the Lord had other plans. Fish his way and an amazing catch comes in. Peter knew that. Regardless of what common sense and years of experience told him, he did it the Lord's way. You see the results. So, the Lord tells us to worship him, to bring faithful offerings to him, to pray to him in words and song, to remember our Baptism and to regularly receive his body and blood. Worship is for you to serve, thank and praise, God. Do you get anything out of worship? Oh, I don't know – just peace, joy, strength and salvation – but the liturgy is hard to sing, the sermon is boring and the pipe organ is especially difficult to dance to.

“...do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.”

“Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”

AMEN