



# MARTIN LUTHER LUTHERAN CHURCH

Worship (October 9, 2011 + Isaiah 25:1-9)

In one church this morning an elderly woman is kneeling, clutching a string of wooden beads. The rosary is fairly smooth when it leaves the factory, but its smoothness today is not from file or sandpaper, but from passing through her hands as she prayerfully passes through life. When her son returns from the service, the beads get smoother. When her first grandchild is born, the beads get smoother. When her husband passes, the beads get smoother. Every morning and every evening, the beads get smoother. This morning she is down on arthritic knees, leaning on a creaking walnut pew, and as the beads pass through her hands, and as tears pass down her face, she prays.

In another church this morning a young man is standing with arms upraised. He sings a song that sounds like it is on the radio. In front of him stand huge video screens and flashing colored lights. Behind him stands not only a coffee shop and bookstore, but all of the sin-guilts he is leaving behind him in this moment, as he re-commits himself to following God's ways in this world, come what may. As the loud music plays on, and as the videos change, all of the concerns he brought with him this morning are pushed from his focus. So he raises up his hands, and lays down his plans, and for God's help he prays.

In another church this morning a child fills spaces in a coloring book. While the yellowing minister rambles on about governmental things, while her mother whispers about what another woman is wearing, while her dad checks his watch against kick-off, while all of this goes on, she colors in pictures of Christ: born in the manger, healing the sick, dying on the cross, risen from the dead, welcoming the children. While the minister moves on to the economy, while her mother starts her grocery list, while her dad checks his watch yet again, the little girl's Crayola Christ beckons her: "Come to me. Stay with me. I love you." And she folds her little fingers and prays.

Every Christian in every church looks unique. The diversity of Christian worship reflects the diversity of Christians. The challenge remains, however, to worship one way without looking down on another.

If I sent you to another church this morning, I imagine you could come up with a list of what they are doing “right” and what they are doing “wrong.” I envision you coming up with a list of evaluations of this other community’s worship, a list of positives or negatives. For example, “I like having donuts after worship.” or “I don’t like having to introduce myself to others.” “I like the music.” or “They call that music?” “I liked what the preacher said.” or “What was he trying to say?” “That was a great church.” or “It was freezing.”

Even if rosaries or colored lights or coloring books aren’t your thing (like they’re not mine), the trouble is that when it comes to worship, too often we have

all looked down on others, when another’s worship is something that does not concern us. The goal of worship is not to please everyone in the pews, but to please God. The objective of the morning is not to get you out the door smiling, but to get God smiling. The point of a worship service is not increasing your contentment, but God’s.

The audience of a worship service is not the 30 in the country church pews, or the 3,000 in the big city church seats; the audience of worship is the One on the throne. To Him we give our worship this morning. To Him we sing our songs of praise. To Him we pray our prayers.

He likes a prayer said with a rosary, as much as one said with a rock band, as much as one said with a coloring book.

Why? When we think of the word ‘worship’ we usually think of an event in a place. We think of some sort of church service in some sort of church building. You probably think of gathering here, now. But the biblical word ‘worship’ is not defined that way. The most common word in the Bible translated ‘worship’ is not an event in a place; it is an attitude. Worship in the Bible is rarely an event in a place, but normally an attitude towards God.

God creates you. God forgives you. God loves you. God blesses you over and over and over. And all he seeks in return is for you to notice, and form an attitude of worship, a posture of praise.

I’m sure you have a lot on your minds this morning. But take this opportunity to evaluate your attitude. Who are you singing to? Who are you standing for? Who is really watching you?

Amidst the music and the readings, the preaching and the praying, take this time in this building during this service to set your attitude towards God. Acknowledge His greatness over your humbleness. Acknowledge His power over your weakness. Acknowledge His righteousness over your wrongdoings. Acknowledge His eager blessings over your paltry response. Do that morning after morning, week after week, and all these Sunday mornings in this building will form something that is not a building or an event, but an attitude.

For one day, when all the prayer beads are laid down, when all the fancy worship services are over, when all the pictures are colored, when this sanctuary is knocked down, and these worship services are but a distant memory, “when the morning stars sing together, and all the heavenly beings shout for joy” (Job 38:7), then our worship of God will continue, to our audience of One, because God’s attitude towards an attitude of worship is that it is eternal.

Let us pray. “O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you, I will praise your name; for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure” (Is. 25:1). Amen.