

Pathways II: Worship

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Sermons are supposed to start with a hook. Something that grabs you and won't let go. Here's a try. Think with me of a place of sheer terror. I refer to the school-sanctioned, socially mandated . . . middle school dance. The place where boys stand on this end, girls on this end, and if the two meet,¹ it's to touch shoulders and rock back and forth. Remember the misery—should I go? Ok I'm here. Do I dance? I'm dancing. What do we talk about with this person now far closer than I meant to be? Most of us aren't good at dancing. Very few get better and love it. Me? I got a C in ballroom dancing in college. Good thing that didn't go on the transcript. I knew a guy.

Most of us feel that awkward about worship. We don't really know how to do it. If we get stuck in the room we hang back. If we're forced to be up front we fake it. Most of us are not good at being not good at things. I can understand why many people avoid worship.

Well how do we learn to do things we're not good at? Same as on the dance floor, we copy other people. I first watched Baptists as a teenager. They seemed really to love me. So when they wanted me to cry and walk up an aisle and accept Jesus I did—girls were impressed with that, and by then I didn't want to be far away from them. I've worshiped also with Catholics—now this was a *routine*! Cross yourself, kneel, bow. Methodists are sort of like a Baptist Catholic hybrid. We want you saved. We also see Jesus in the sacraments and liturgy. The more of Jesus the better. *Here* I think folks watch our saints. One of our newer people asked me where John Marshbanks has been. You didn't know his name, you said the tall man with the wonderful face. I said we all miss him, he's more seasonal now, he'll be back some. Or our praise team [or choir]—showing us all how to worship. Most of us stand politely not singing, junior high dance again. Watch someone and copy them! Look at this from Thomas Merton,²

The saint preaches sermons by the way he walks,
and the way he stands,
and the way he picks things up
and holds them in his hands.

I love a film on French monks in Algeria³ called *Of Gods and Men*. One conversation is between a teenage Muslim girl and an elderly French monk. She asks how to know you're in love. He says your heart beats faster, your head spins, you wish you weren't there and you wish more of you were there. She asks if he ever felt that. He says yes, but then I gave

¹ http://img.izismile.com/img/img3/20100923/640/the_most_awkward_640_11.jpg

² Quote up plz

³ <http://graphics8.nytimes.com/images/2011/02/25/arts/25GODS-span/GODS-articleLarge.jpg>

that up for a greater love, and he has loved me for 60 years. Romantic love is only *there* to show us a greater love Christ has for us. That's also the reason friendship is there, work is there, breathing and eating and sleeping are there. To show us *God* is lover, friend, hard work, air, food, rest, life.⁴ Discover Life Together our tagline says. Or, discover Jesus.

⁵This is the second in a series of sermons on our new graphic identity, called Pathways. Today we focus on one of the steps by which we make disciples. It's usually but not always first: we worship together.⁶ Here's the icon for worship you'll see much more of. If you want to know who someone is, watch what they worship. Hear this word from John, and listen especially for the way this woman comes alive in Jesus' presence. It's *like* romantic love. Only far greater.

4 [Jesus] had to go through Samaria. 5 So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. 7 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." 8 (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.). 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans). 10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." 11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12 Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" 13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." 15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." 16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." 17 The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" 19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. 20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. 24 God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in Spirit and in truth." 25 The woman said to him, "I know

⁴ Tagline up please

⁵ Logo up please

⁶ Icon for worship up please

that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” 26 Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking with you.”

That’s the word of God, it belongs to you, the people of God, thanks be to God.

In Israel you meet your spouse at a well (they didn’t have eHarmony yet). So when Jesus is alone and meets an unmarried woman at a well--ding ding ding!—bells go off. A wedding is coming.

What’s the equivalent for us? It might be a coffee shop. Have you ever noticed that people at coffee shops glare at you if you try to talk? But go to the library and everybody’s talking. Weird. We meet over coffee, do church over coffee. So, last week we all had coffee *together*—Chuck Eyler, a new leader in our church organized having coffee brought in from Espresso News downtown. This week we’re making that same coffee in our kitchen. There’s also the same coffee you’re used to, lighter stuff. The point is to have all our ages of folks meet in the chapel and talk before Sunday School. Let’s try this for this series. The goal is to have all our adult generations, our eldest in their 90s, our youngest in their 20s mix, meet, befriend, meet Jesus in one another. And having this coffee time together allows new people to be greeted with the honor they deserve. Chuck and his wife Anna found that folks were friendly in service and then disappeared down a magic hallway right after, leaving them alone. Last week *two* new visiting families came to the coffee time and found their way to a Sunday School class same day. Victory. That’s what we want.

The story from John has a hint of the forbidden about it. This woman comes for water when she can avoid others. She’s a Samaritan. Samaritans descend from Abraham Isaac and Jacob but Jesus and his people think they’re phonies, fakes. Samaritans built a temple on Mount Gerazim, like Moses commanded. Really—look,⁷ “When the Lord your God has brought you into the land that you are entering to occupy, you shall set the blessing on Mount Gerizim.” Jews forgot that part of the bible. Samaritans didn’t include the stuff in the bible about the kings. *There’s no rivalry like sibling rivalry.* Jews don’t talk to Samaritans. They certainly don’t drink with them. The Samaritan woman has had 6 husbands, or 5 plus a live-in. She’s triply outcast: woman, Samaritan, serial monogymist. And Jesus talks to her.⁸ Our congregation’s value, “Everybody everywhere matters,” is born right here. What do most people think of when they think of the word “Samaritan” now? *Good Samaritans*, as in Good Samaritan laws. Jesus so flipped the word it now means the opposite of what it meant.

Do you see how Christian worship is dangerous? We’re coming face to face with the living God. I’ll give you an example. In the 1980s East Germany was still very much a

⁷ This bit of Deut 11:29 on screen plz.

⁸ Value on screen plz

communist country. There could be no mass gatherings, no protests. But the communists left the churches open. They figured Christianity would wither away. Instead Christians had prayer meetings. Seems innocent enough. St. Nicholas Church in East Berlin was the only place people could meet, plan, protest.⁹ And soon tens of thousands of people were coming to prayer meeting.¹⁰ Some say the Berlin Wall wouldn't have fallen without St. Nicholas's Church.ⁱ We Methodists can relate, Methodism *is* a prayer meeting that got out of hand.ⁱⁱ I was struck seeing the movie *Selma* about the civil rights movement how the meetings always took place in churches.¹¹ Protestors would show up from Ivy League schools and be taken to a church, and told to sing for three hours. When are we going to the rally? Shut up! Sing Amazing Grace again. There's no way to face batons and dogs if you're not prayed up. Christian worship is dangerous, it makes us a new we, we wouldn't have been otherwise. And it all starts with a drink of water.

Here's another sort of danger. My mentor James Howell is at a church in Charlotte that offers a pub night. They even invited him, the senior minister, it was like inviting grandpa. He watched a woman get off from work and say what a hard day she'd had, they prayed over her. Another woman said look at pictures from my mission trip to Nigeria, someone else signed up. Church was happening right there at the pub. But he realized he didn't know the two women beside him. He was embarrassed till he finally said "I'm sorry I don't know y'all's names." They said, "We don't know your name." Pub night *was* church. They never miss it. That big building he preaches they'll never go into. Dangerous, right? But hey, Jesus will go anywhere to get anybody.

In John, Jesus keeps people constantly confused. Listen to this woman: ¹² "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a Samaritan?" Jesus says I have *living water* for you.¹³ She says "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep." Jesus says my water becomes in you a spring and you will never thirst. She wants some. Who wouldn't? He says to call her husband. She won't.¹⁴ "Jesus said to her, 'You are right; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband.'" Now here Jesus is toying with her. Her inability to stay married is a metaphor for the idea that we human beings can't seem to worship the one true god. We keep moving around. Our heart is set on this, or that, or the other.¹⁵ Martin Luther said, "Wherever your heart is, there is your god." And think of all the good things we turn into gods—romance, success, money, friendships. All good. None is God. Don't worship them.

⁹ <https://mw2.google.com/mw-panoramio/photos/medium/76001696.jpg>

¹⁰ <http://www.thekidswindow.co.uk/images/CMScontent/Image/berlin20wall20freedom.jpg>

¹¹ http://www.blackpast.org/files/blackpast_images/King_Last_Sermon.jpg

¹² John 4:9 on screen plz

¹³ This bit of 4:11 up

¹⁴ 4:17-18 up plz

¹⁵ Quote on screen plz

She tries to wiggle off her hook. She plays theologian: ¹⁶ “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that people must worship in Jerusalem.” This is how people respond to the gospel who’ve had like a religion class and think they’re experts. ‘The bible has so many translations, so many different manuscripts, who can know?’ Well, the bible has vastly better manuscripts than we have of Plato. But no serious scholar disputes that Plato existed, or that we can’t know what he thought. We debate whether Plato was *right*. Somehow Christianity, with vastly more historical trustworthiness gets dismissed, ah, who can know what happened? That’s shoddy history. It’s designed to avoid Jesus. Jesus is living water. Drink from him and never thirst. You’re going to avoid Jesus by saying you took a class? Read a book? Watched a tv show? You’re not as original as you think.

You see a similar effort to *use* religion to avoid Jesus in what’s called the worship wars. Have you heard of these? Especially in the 90s we had big arguments over whether to worship with guitars or organs. Contemporary or traditional.¹⁷ Robes and Latin,¹⁸ or cool hair and neck beards. Then someone wise said, hey, wait, why are we fighting over this? Let’s just call our diversity an asset. It’s something we can all treasure about this congregation--you don’t have to leave here to find a worship style you want. Styles are like Mt. Gerazim, Jerusalem—they’re good, but we can worship Jesus anywhere, any way. And Jesus just keeps flirting with us. Calling us to something higher and better.

Worship makes us our best selves. In older wedding vows the couple would say to one another,¹⁹ “With my body I thee worship.” I give you my everything. Then I get myself back. Only better. So too with God. In worship we give God everything. Our songs—where else in our culture do people sing? Happy birthday? Take me out to the ballgame? We give God our greeting: when we greet people at church we say to old enemies, “I forgive you.” To strangers, “I see Jesus in you.” To our elders, “I honor you.” To our next generation, “I treasure you.” To old friends, “I love you.” We give our attention. I’ve told y’all this story before about a man preaching away, African-American church, and he knows it’s a terrible sermon. But one lady keeps amen’ing, saying yes, preach Jesus! On her way out he says ma’am, that was a terrible sermon, why were you carrying on like that? She said, “well, just because you’re not doing your job doesn’t mean I’m not going to do mine.” We give God our treasure. Our money, our time, our wisdom, the things most important to us. We give God weird-stuff: around here we have trail builders, knitters, marathoners, teachers, banjo players, woodworkers cookie bakers all giving those gifts to God. We give God not just an hour or two. Worship defines our life. We give an hour as a first fruits to God. On the way to giving our whole selves to God. With our bodies we worship God. This woman has had 5

¹⁶ This bit of Jn 4:19-20 up plz

¹⁷ <http://emmanueloc.org/images/liturgy.jpg>

¹⁸ http://www.h2ocrusade.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/iStock_000006831660Small.jpg

¹⁹ On screen plz

husbands, one live in, Jesus is her 7th, and in the bible 7 is the perfect number of completion. She'll need to marry no more.

I got to be with Sergeant Bobby Creed this week from Boone's finest. And as he talked to a young man about substance abuse I wanted to weep, or strangle this boy. I'd heard the man's 911 call. He thought he was dying. And now Bobby was begging him, hey, do something else. Anything else. I'm worried about you *surviving*. Bless your good work Bobby, and all your colleagues. I wonder what other things the man will try. If he gets off the chemicals, maybe a spouse, a job, hobbies. But nothing will satisfy. Only Jesus. All other longings are only there to point us to him.²⁰ GK Chesterton said, "The man knocking on the door of a prostitute and the man showing up at church are seeking the same thing." They just don't know it. God! Love! To desire and be desired! All other desires exist to point us to our ultimate desire.

Listen to her after one conversation with Jesus, she tells everyone who looks down on her:²¹

29 "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! . . . 39 Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done."

Jesus knows her fully. And regards her without judgment. Makes her part of his body, the church. Makes her a leader, an apostle. Once she was nobody now she is somebody—by being part of Jesus' body.

That's worship. Becoming the somebody God wants all of us to be. Together.

Will you pray with me?²² I take this prayer from our worship chair Jana Duke, who takes it from the long, wise memory of the church:

O God, whom saints and angels delight to worship in heaven: Be with your servants who seek through art and music to perfect the praises offered by your people on earth; and grant to us even now glimpses of your beauty, and make us worthy at length to see you face to face for evermore; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Amen.

²⁰ Quote up plz

²¹ Jn 4:29 & 39 up plz

²² Prayer up plz

ⁱ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/0/24661333>

ⁱⁱ I take this from Austin Eggers—via his teacher at Fuller