**Why We Worship**

*Perhaps no other single act best describes what it means to be Christian than attending weekly Sunday worship. But what is the point of worship? Is it for God? For us? How does praying together each week change our lives and touch our hearts?*

*Here’s an excerpt from Marcus Borg’s The Heart of Christianity (which, is an excellent brief overview of Christianity for those interested).*

Worship can be a “thin place” [in which we see God shining through our own reality]. Indeed, this is one of its primary purposes. Of course, worship is about praising God. But worship is not about God needing praise. I recall hearing a radio preacher talking about how “God just loves to be praised.” He made God sound like a narcissist. Rather worship has the power to draw us out of ourselves. Worship is directed to God, but is in an important sense, for us.

Worship is about creating a sense of the sacred, a thin place. The diverse forms of Christian worship do this in different ways. At one end of the spectrum, the enthusiasm of Pentecostal worship can become a thin place by mediating an almost palpable sense of the presence of the Spirit. At the other end of the spectrum, Quaker silence serves the same purpose. In liturgical and sacramental forms of worship, the use of sacred words and rituals creates a sense of another world.

The primary purpose of participatory music – congregational singing – is to provide a thin place. More Protestants report being moved by hymn singing than by any other element of the service. We sing to God, and our hearts are opened. The hymns that do this best combine two features: words that move us and music that can be easily sung.

Liturgical words – by which I mean words that are a regular part of the worship service – can become thin places. For virtually all Christians, this includes the Lord’s Prayer; and for most, it also includes the creed, a confession of sin, and a few responses (e.g. ‘And also with you’). When we say words that we know “by heart” it is not an intellectual exercise in which we think about the meaning of the words… Rather the point is to let the drone of these words that we know by heart become a thin place.

So, also, saying the Creed can become a thin place. I know that many mainline Christians have difficulties with the creed, and I understand why. If one thinks that saying the creed commits one’s intellect to the propositional (literal?) truth of all its statements, it is impossible for a thoughtful modern person to do so. But affirming all of the creed’s statements to be literally true is not the purpose of saying the creed in the context of worship….It’s primary purpose in worship is sacramental: through these clunky words that stumble in the presence of Mystery, God is mediated. These words can become a thin place as we join ourselves to the sound of the community saying these words together. As we do so, we also join ourselves with a community that transcends time: all of those centuries of Christians who have heard and said these words.

*Here are some possible jumping off points for your discussion:*

* There are lots of places you could be on a Sunday morning, yet with at least some frequency, you come to church. What do you value most about Sunday worship? What do you get out of it?
* Do you find that Sunday worship becomes a “thin place” for you…often, occasionally, rarely, never? Perhaps there are particular services of the church year, or particular parts of each Sunday service, that do this? How important is this for you?
* Borg specifically addresses the issue of praying the Creed together. How do you feel about saying the Creed? Is it challenging, affirming…something you never think about?

A Prayer:

O Almighty God, who pours out on all who desire it the spirit of grace and of supplication; Deliver us, when we draw near to you in worship, from coldness of heart and wanderings of mind, that with steadfast thoughts and kindled affections we may worship you in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.