

Is your heart hungry for worship?

by Rev. Robert Griffith

People on a plane and people in a Church building have a lot in common. All are on a journey. Most are well behaved and presentable. Some doze, and others gaze out the window. Most, if not all, are satisfied with a predictable experience. For many, the mark of a good flight and the mark of a good worship assembly are the same. "Nice," we like to say. "That was a nice flight. That was a nice worship service." We exit the same way we enter, and we're happy to return next time.

A few, however, are not content with 'nice.' They long for something more. The boy who the plane ahead of me did. I heard him before I saw him. I was not even at the door when he asked, "*Will they really let me meet the pilot?*" He was either lucky or shrewd because he made the request just as he entered the plane. The question floated into the cockpit, causing the pilot to lean out. "*Someone looking for me?*" he asked. The boy's hand shot up like he was answering his second class teacher's question. "*I am!*" "*Well, come on in.*" With a nod from his mother, the youngster entered the cockpit's world of controls and gauges and emerged minutes later with eyes wide and face all aglow. "*Wow!*" he exclaimed. "*I'm so glad to be on this plane!*"

No one else's face showed such wonder. I should know. I paid attention. The boy's interest piqued mine, so I studied the faces of the other passengers but found no such enthusiasm. I mostly saw contentment: travelers content to be on the plane, content to be closer to their destination, content to be out of the airport, content to sit and stare and say little.

There were a few exceptions. The five or so middle-age women wearing straw hats and carrying beach bags weren't content; they were exuberant. They giggled all the way down the aisle. My bet is they were mums-set-free-from-kitchens-and-kids. The guy in the blue suit across the aisle wasn't content; he was cranky. He opened his laptop and scowled at its screen the entire trip. Most of us, however, were happier than he and more contained than the ladies.

Most of us were content. Content with a predictable, uneventful flight. Content with a "nice" flight. And since that is what we sought, that is what we got. The boy, on the other hand, wanted more. He wanted to see the pilot. If asked to describe the flight, he would certainly not say "nice." He'd likely produce the plastic wings the pilot gave him and say, "*I saw the man up front.*"

Do you see why I say that people on a plane and people in Church have a lot in common? Enter a church worship centre and look at the faces. A few are giggly, a couple are cranky, but by and large we are content. Content to be there. Content to sit and look straight ahead and leave when the service is over. Content to enjoy an assembly with no surprises or turbulence. Content with a "nice" service. "*Seek and you will find,*" Jesus promised. And since a nice service is what we seek, a nice service is usually what we find.

A few, however, seek more. A few come with the child-like enthusiasm of the boy. And those few leave as he did, wide-eyed with the wonder of having stood in the presence of the pilot himself. The same thing happened to Jesus. The day Jesus went to worship, his very face was changed. Yes, that's right, Jesus actually went to worship. The Bible speaks of a day when Jesus took time to stand with friends in the presence of God.

Let's read about the day Jesus went to worship:

“Six days later, Jesus took Peter, James, and John, the brother of James, up on a high mountain by themselves. While they watched, Jesus’ appearance was changed; his face became bright like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. Then Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you want, I will put up three tents here - one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” While Peter was talking, a bright cloud covered them. A voice came from the cloud and said, “This is my Son, whom I love, and I am very pleased with him. Listen to him!” (Matthew 17:1-5)

The words of Matthew presuppose a decision on the part of Jesus to stand in the presence of God. The simple fact that he chose his companions and went up on a mountain suggests this was no spur-of-the-moment action. He didn’t wake up one morning, look at the calendar and then at His watch, and say, *“Oops, today is the day we go to the mountain.”* No, He had preparations to make. Ministry to people was suspended so ministry to His heart could occur. Since His chosen place of worship was some distance away, he had to select the right path and stay on the right road. By the time He was on the mountain, his heart was ready. Jesus prepared for worship. Let me ask you, do you do the same? Do you prepare for worship? What paths do you take to lead you up the mountain? The question may seem foreign, but my hunch is, many of us simply wake up and show up. We’re sadly casual when it comes to meeting God.

As we begin a brand new chapter in our new worship and ministry centre, I want to urge you to come to worship prepared to worship. Pray before you come so you will be ready to pray when you arrive. Sleep before you come so you’ll stay alert when you arrive. Read the Word before you come so your heart will be soft when you worship. Come hungry. Come willing. Come expecting God to speak. Come asking, even as you walk through the door, *“Can I see the pilot today?”*

As you do, you’ll discover the purpose of worship - to change the face of the worshiper. This is exactly what happened to Christ on the mountain. Jesus’ appearance was changed: *“His face became bright like the sun”* (Matthew 17:2). The connection between the face and worship is more than coincidental. Our face is the most public part of our bodies, covered less than any other area. It is also the most recognizable part of our bodies. We don’t have a photo of our feet on our passport, we have a photo of our face. Well, God desires to take our faces, this exposed and memorable part of our bodies, and use them to reflect His goodness and glory. Paul writes: *“Our faces, then, are not covered. We all show the Lord’s glory, and we are being changed to be like him. This change in us brings ever greater glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit”* (2 Corinthians 3:18).

God invites us to see His face so He can change ours. He uses our uncovered faces to display His glory. The transformation isn’t easy. But our Lord is up to the task. He loves to change the faces of His children. By His fingers, wrinkles of worry are rubbed away. Shadows of shame and doubt become portraits of grace and trust. He will relax clenched jaws and smooth furrowed brows. His touch can remove the bags of exhaustion from beneath the eyes and turn tears of despair into tears of peace. How? Through worship. We’d expect something more complicated, more demanding. A forty-day fast or the memorization of Leviticus perhaps. No. God’s plan is simple. He changes our faces through worship.

Exactly what is worship? I like King David’s definition. *“Oh magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together”* (Ps. 34:3 NASB). Worship is the act of magnifying God. Enlarging our vision of Him. Stepping into the cockpit to see where He sits and observe how He works. Of course, His size doesn’t change, but our perception of Him does. As we draw nearer, He seems larger. Isn’t that what we need? A big view of God? Don’t we have big problems, big worries, big questions? Of course we do. Hence we need a big view of God. Worship offers that.

How can we sing, *“Holy, Holy, Holy”* and not have our vision expanded? Or what about the lines from *“It Is Well with My Soul”*?

*My sin - O the bliss of this glorious thought,
My sin - not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*

Can we sing those words and not have our countenance illuminated? A vibrant, shining face is the mark of one who has stood in God’s presence. After speaking to God, Moses had to cover his face with a veil (Exod. 34:33-35). After seeing heaven, Stephen’s face glowed like that of an angel (Acts 6:15; 7:55-56).

God is in the business of changing the face of the world. Let me be very clear. This change is his job, not ours. Our goal is not to make our faces radiant. Not even Jesus did that. Matthew says, *“Jesus’ appearance was changed”* it doesn’t say, *“Jesus changed his appearance.”* Moses didn’t even know his face was shining (Exod. 34:29). Our goal is not to conjure up some fake, frozen expression. Our goal is simply to stand before God with a prepared and willing heart and then let God do His work. And He does. He wipes away the tears. He mops away the perspiration. He softens our furrowed brows. He touches our cheeks. He changes our faces as we worship.

But there’s more. Not only does God change the face of those who worship, He changes those who watch us worship. Remember the boy who went to see the pilot? His passion stirred me. I wanted to see the pilot too. The same dynamic occurs when we come to worship with a heart of worship. Paul told the Corinthian church to worship in such a clear way that if an unbeliever entered, *“he would find . . . the secrets of his heart revealed; and . . . would fall down on his face and worship God, declaring that God is indeed among you”* (1 Corinthians 14:24-25). David cites the evangelistic power of honest worship in Psalm 40:3: *“He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many people will see this and worship Him. Then they will trust the LORD.”*

Your heartfelt worship is a missionary appeal. Let unbelievers hear the passion of your voice or see the sincerity in your face, and they may be changed. Peter was. When Peter saw the worship of Jesus, he said, *“Lord, it is good that we are here. If you want, I will put up three tents here - one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”* (Matthew 17:4).

Mark says Peter spoke out of fear (9:6). Luke says Peter spoke out of ignorance (9:33). But whatever the reason, at least Peter spoke. He wanted to do something for God. He didn’t understand that God wants hearts and not tents, but at least he was moved to give something. Why? Because he saw the transfigured face of Christ. The same happens in churches today. When people see us giving heartfelt praise to God - when they hear our worship - they are intrigued. They want to see the pilot! Sparks from our fire tend to ignite dry hearts. Seekers may not understand all that happens in a house of worship. They may not understand the meaning of a song or the significance of communion, but they know joy when they see it. And when they see your face changed, they may want to see God’s face.

Do you come to church with a worship-hungry heart? Our Saviour did. I want to urge you to be just like Jesus? Prepare your heart for worship. Let God change your face through worship. Demonstrate the power of worship. Above all, seek the face of the pilot. The boy did. Because he sought the pilot, he left with a changed face and a set of wings. The same can happen to you. And what better time is there to have a new attitude to worship than when God gifts us a new worship centre in which to encounter Him in all His glory.