

Lent Day 7

Wednesday February 21, 2018

Reading: John 4:1-38

¹⁹ “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

²¹ “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

Reflection

I was baptized as an infant in the Anglican Church, I came to faith as a child in a Baptist church, I attended a Pentecostal church as a new Christian in my 20's, I grew up in my faith in a Congregational church and I discerned a calling to do pastoral ministry in the Free Methodist Church. Because of this diversity I have an appreciation for several different forms of worship which have come to mean a great deal to me. However, I've also listened to some of the debate over 'traditional' and 'contemporary' forms of worship — each one bad or good depending on your context. I also realize that Lent for a lot of people belongs in the 'traditional' category and I know Christians I greatly respect embrace it or reject it. On the one hand for those who hold to traditional forms these are necessary rhythms but those who reject them they are meaningless rituals.

Jesus has a chat with a Samaritan woman (two reasons he shouldn't be speaking to her in his day) and she poses a question about where the 'right' place to worship is; on their mountain or in Jerusalem. Jesus continues his tradition-busting roll by telling her, neither! Rather, in this new day of the appearance of the Messiah — who is God with us — worship isn't localized to place anymore, but to person. Worship is to happen sincerely in the Spirit. This should be balanced out by noticing how Jesus goes up to the temple at all the festival times as well as his commitment to worship in local synagogues throughout his journey. In other words it's not an either/or. People can use traditional elements of worship to worship the Father in Spirit and in truth, but they can also do so right on their own doorsteps.

Remember that everything quickly becomes a tradition, even full bands with drums and electric guitars, video clips and dramas. As soon as it becomes the way it must be done — for all the best reasons — it's become traditional. The real question we have to pose as we worship, does this facilitate my (better our) worshipping the Father in Spirit and in truth? Lent, while being a traditional observance doesn't need to be cold routine. With intentionality it can be a structure to spiritual vibrancy and renewal — it's all in the attitude.

Prayer

Father, Son and Spirit forgive us for how quickly we cool your fresh movement into cold ritual. Stoke the smouldering embers of our hearts to flame for you, so we may do all things as worship for you in Spirit and in truth. Amen.