

The First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham  
Alive in a Global Uprising: The Walk of Worship  
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May 7, 2017

Micah 6:6-8; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

She hit me. That is the only way to describe what happened. She hit me. Cindy and I were in San Antonio, the final Christmas break before I graduated from seminary. We decided to attend First Presbyterian Church there and hear one of my classmates preach. We arrived early only to discover two things. First he was preaching in the chapel, which was not much larger than our own. Second, he was a very popular preacher and the place was packed. Cindy and I scanned the pews and realized that the only one left open was the very last pew. Feeling relieved that we had found a place to sit, we began to slip in. It was then that I got hit. Actually, it was more like a “thwack”. I turned to see who had hit me and it was the usher. She glared at me, and hitting me once again with her stack of bulletins said, “That’s my seat. That’s my pew and you can’t sit there.” A bit stunned, I tried to explain why we were there, but again, “thwack”, “It’s my pew.” I must say, that as I read this week’s story, it occurred to me that that usher would have fit right in at the church in Corinth.

She would fit right in because the church at Corinth was one hot mess. It was a hot mess because people argued over whose baptism was the best. It was a hot mess because they argued over whose spiritual gifts were the best...many thought that speaking in tongues topped them all. They argued over the place of Jews within the community. And on top of all those arguments they were selfish. This selfishness is at the center of our text this morning. To understand this, let me set the scene. In the early church, people met in homes. They had no church buildings. When they met in homes, people would bring their own picnic lunches and bottles of wine. Unfortunately, what was happening was that some of the Christians who were arriving early were those with means and they would chow down on their lunches and get drunk on their wine. So when the late comers, who were probably the servants and slaves arrived, there was not only nothing left to eat or drink, but when they asked for food or drink that others brought, we might imagine that they got “thwacked” and were told, “Hey, hands off, that is mine.”

It would be easy for us to pass off these actions as people being rude and deciding that they need to go back to kindergarten and learn some manners. But for Paul, these actions are not about rudeness. They are about God’s people not walking their worship. Let me explain. Worship within the Jewish tradition, while containing certain rites and rituals such as sacrifices and the reading of the law, is at its core about how people live. It is about people walking the road of right relationships and right living that God laid out for them in the Torah. We hear this clearly in the words of the prophet Micah. “*“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”*” In other words, worship is what we do and how we

live. This means that worship is not contained within this building but is a lived experience every day of our lives and in every place where we live, learn and work.

This is why the Apostle Paul reminds them of the content of the Lord's Supper. He doesn't do so because they are using the wrong words, or because their liturgy is incorrect, but because their lives are not walking the worship that is at the heart of the supper. He reminds them that Jesus allowed his body to be broken for them. He reminds them that Jesus allowed his blood to be shed for them. He reminds them that this sacrificial action is supposed to be the road that they are walking. He reminds them that every time they eat and drink at the table they are pledging themselves to walk the walk of love, compassion sacrifice and sharing. And he warns them that when they fail to walk their worship, they will find themselves living lives that lead not to the strength that God offers, but to lives that lead to the weakness that the world offers. Therefore, they are to carefully examine their lives before coming to the table. They are to ask themselves if they are indeed walking their worship; if their lives are examples of Christ's compassion and sacrifice.

You and I are to ask ourselves the same things. We are to ask ourselves if we are walking our worship; if we are living our lives of service, compassion, sharing and sacrifice. So, that is my challenge to all of us on this communion Sunday, to examine our walk as we wait for the elements to be passed. To ask ourselves this question, am I walking my worship in such a way that I reflect the sacrificial life shown to me at this table?