

The Unpredictable Worshipper

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'

Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.' – [Matthew 14:22-33; NRSV]

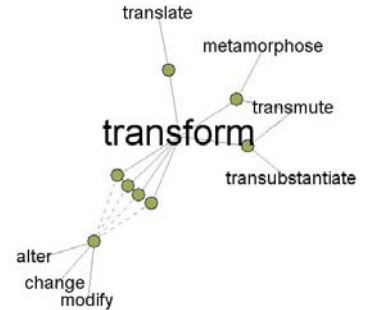
The cycle of worship

During the past several weeks we've been in a worship series about worship. We've heard about the undone worshipper, the undivided worshipper, the undignified worshipper and the unquenchable worshipper. Today we'll look at the unpredictable worshipper; a worshipper "ready to follow the adventurous whispers of the Holy Spirit." [Matt Redman, [The Unquenchable Worshipper](#), 60]

I want to start with the Gospel reading from Matthew. This is one of my favorite passages in the bible because the words remind me to get out of my comfort zone (and here I am). A few weeks ago, these verses were read to me over the internet from a website devoted to [daily guided prayer time](#) and I found new meaning in them. I think they are also describing a cycle of worship that leads to transformation:

- In this passage, it started with **worship**. Jesus and the disciples had just finished a time of teaching & miracles & worship with the crowd of 5000+. What an amazing experience that must have been? I bet they'd just like to take it easy for a while, rest up and savor the memory.
- But, next came the **calling** (Jesus tells them to *go on ahead to the other side*).
- *The boat was far from the land*. The disciples had **obeyed** the calling because of their **faith** in Jesus.
- Then they faced **doubt** as they *were battered by the waves*. Out in the world they feel alone, scared, things are happening outside their control, and in their panic it is difficult to recognize that Jesus is there to help.
- Then one among them seeks his **calling** (Peter says, *Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water*). That sounds kind of like a dare, doesn't it?
- Can't you just imagine Peter's reaction when he hears the response from Jesus, *come*. Well, he asked for it and I think he must have stepped to the edge of the boat, taken a deep breath and just **obeyed**.
- *He started walking on the water but then he noticed the strong wind*, and then he had **doubt** again. He got caught up in worldly cares again and *became frightened and beginning to sink he cries out, "Lord, save me!"* I think I know a little how Peter felt. You see I'm out of the boat here and I've been freaking out all week. I've been plagued by doubt and overwhelmed at the prospect of speaking to you. I've also felt compelled to do it and comforted and supported along the way.
- *When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.* They recognized that the Lord could protect them from the storm and their thankfulness seems boundless until...

It seems that worshipping God leads to a cycle of coming and going, of faith and doubt, of growing and regressing, of being pushed out of our comfort zone to do God's will and of us often finding the world out there an overwhelming and scary place. It implies change, maybe even chaos in our lives, individually and corporately. When we acknowledge the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our church, I think we can expect to be in transformation our whole life.



Trash People

The artist HA Schult has created an exhibit called 1000 trash people and it has been installed at famous locations all over the world. I discovered the exhibit online in front of the famous cathedral in Cologne while looking for church images. It struck me that this exhibit is a good metaphor for Christians. We are trash people with all the baggage we've collected from the world. And we don't miraculously lose this baggage when we enter worship. We bring it with us: our prejudices and preferences, our knowledge and illusions, our confidence and fears.



I believe our work with God is to strip away the trash we have collected to reveal the Holy Spirit at work within us. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians, "But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us." In modern times, we have managed to add layers of trash to our fragile jars. So isn't it amazing then how we tend to cling to our trash very tightly even when we recognize that it is trash, that it could break us. I think that's because it's what we know. Unfortunately, we don't know God as well as we know our trash and so I think we come to worship once a week to try and meet God; to know God better, to let the Holy Spirit work within us and transform us. I believe we need to do whatever we can do to bring our hearts and minds in alignment with this mission when we meet with God in worship.

Unpredictable worship

I didn't know that that was a goal to reach when I started on the worship design team. In fact, I didn't know what I was doing and I wasn't sure where I was on my spiritual journey. I went to various worship conferences in a desperate need to discover what it was that I should be doing to support the team. I got lots of good ideas. I was often inspired and moved by the worship services I experienced. I was sometimes frustrated by my inability to recreate the feel here. I often got sidetracked and had to remind myself, now what's the purpose of worship again? I've had a couple of worship experiences lately that have shown me the amazing potential of authentic worship, filled with the Holy Spirit. I wish I could recreate these worship experiences for you here, but I can't. The best I can do is to tell you what I learned from them.

One of the worship experiences was in Honduras. Nothing could prepare me for what I would find there. I found third-world people living in joy because of their authentic hunger and desire for God and a willingness to let God shape their lives. The Hondurans worshipped with their whole bodies, nothing was held back. They allowed the Holy Spirit to flow through them and touch others. In my journal, I wrote "I have seen the words to the song ***Hungry*** lived out in flesh and blood this week."

Hungry, I come to you
for I know you satisfy.
I am empty, but I know your love
does not run dry.
Broken, I run to you for your arms
are open wide.
I am weary, but I know your touch
restores my life.
So I wait for you, I wait for you.
I'm falling on my knees.
Offering all of me.
Jesus, you're all this heart is living for.



It's difficult to explain this joy because I did also experience the paradoxes of peace vs. violence, hope vs. fear, joy vs. despair, and wants vs. needs. I've experienced these paradoxes in the U.S. too, but in Honduras the divide between the haves and the have nots is so vast that these paradoxes become much more striking. I know my own joy came in discovering that when I left my comfort zone and the distractions of the stuff I've accumulated, I found myself in the presence of God. It was a presence that I could feel with all my senses. It was an experience of God I had never had before. In Honduras I could see that God has chosen "the weak things of this world to put the powerful to shame." [1 Corinthians 1:27; CEV]

Back in the U.S., I experienced a much different worship style in an emerging church, [Solomon's Porch](#). Their current setting is an old church. They have taken out all the pews and altar and replaced them with sofas and comfy chairs, all oriented toward the center of the room. During the worship service I went to, I sang songs written and played by members, I participated in a small group discussion, I shared a communion meal with my neighbors, and I listened to a member share a story about her spiritual journey.



Everything about the space and service is indigenous, created by the community for worshipping God. The setting is very relaxed and the combination of space and people encourage you to just hang out. Relationship building, creativity, participation and authenticity are highly valued and encouraged.

From this experience I learned that worship should not be a spectator event and that every church has its own unique combination of gifts. There is no formula for the perfect worship service; instead a meaningful experience will come out of the community's involvement, the sharing of their gifts and their willingness to let the Holy Spirit work amongst them.

Peace worship

At Peace, we have many different worship opportunities and styles to participate in. Sometimes I've worried that we're a bit schizophrenic with the number of worship options we have. But now I realize that worrying about style is not that important. It's the unique combination of gifts that we offer and our openness to the Holy Spirit that will create an authentic worship experience. Matt Redman, in his book *The Unquenchable Worshipper*, reminds us that, "we need to realize that dependence on the Holy Spirit is the key to all authentic worship." [*Unquenchable Worshipper*, 60]

What's important is that we recognize that we are a trash people coming to worship to meet God, to be comforted and nurtured by God, to work with God to let go of our trash and to be transformed by the Holy Spirit. It's a life-long process with highs and lows, successes and failures. We should expect that sometimes things will get messy and unpredictable. As Kelly Fryer, author of *Reclaiming the "C" Word* writes, "Ministry is something all of God's people do; where people are free to act because there is a willingness to risk messing things up; where the most important thing is not what happens in here, but rather getting people ready to be church out there." [*Reclaiming the "C" Word*, 45]

In Revelation 2, messages are delivered to four different church communities. Each message is unique to the church community its being delivered to, noting things going well and not so well, but each message ends with this plea – "Let anyone who has an ear, listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches." Let's listen! Let's dare to be unpredictable worshippers!



Revelation 2:7

Let anyone who has an ear, listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.