

What's Important When You Come To Church?

When you decide to come to a worship service on Sunday morning, what's important? What makes it an important moment for you in your faith journey? While you will undoubtedly have your own individual answers to that question, here are some of my ideas about that.

First of all, it's important that you decided to come – simply that. You could have made another choice. While going to church worship on Sunday mornings can be a powerful habit for all sorts of reasons, it's surprising how quickly and easily the habit of not going to church can develop. Yet you have chosen to intentionally be part of a worship experience that does something for you, and with which you consciously and unconsciously engage. That choice means you decide to be willing for worship to touch you in all its subtle or more evident ways.

That's another thing that's important – the way the worship service connects with you and you with it. At its best, that connection is bi-directional, that is, you notice and pay attention to the nature of the experience for yourself, but you also contribute to the experience for others as well. Without that connection between you and the worship event, it's only an empty exercise with little meaning all around.

Your engagement with the worship experience is vital for deeper reasons too. You could come with the expectation that you will simply receive whatever is offered in the way of experiences during the service and the social time surrounding it. In this way you could be just an observer or spectator for whatever is presented. And maybe that's the way it is for you sometimes, when you're dispirited or otherwise occupied with cares and concerns of life. There's nothing wrong with that – sometimes.

Most of the time, however, a worship service can be important for you because you choose to be more than a spectator; you choose to be a participant, actively engaging with what is going on and with the many connections that are present. You recognize the web of relationships around you throughout the whole time, and the way these relationships affect you and others in turn. You are open to being affected that way, and see that your presence affects the whole experience for others too.

The relationships are not just with the other people present, but also with the event of worship itself. In perhaps subtle ways, your presence and participation touches and changes the very nature of the experience for everyone there. I certainly know that your presence, individually and collectively, affects me and my experience of any worship service. At its simplest, it would be utterly meaningless were the church to offer a worship experience with no-one else present. In a more subtle and complex way, the participation of every single person makes a difference in what actually is experienced by everyone. That notion emerges from what is called chaos theory and also from performance studies.

For all that to work, a subtle but crucially important element of your participation in a worship experience is one called "emptiness". If you come with some level of willingness to be affected by being part of it all, then you are deciding to leave a little emptiness in yourself, with room for something to happen. If you come completely filled up with your own 'stuff', then there is no room left for inspiration, literally the 'in-coming of the Spirit'. And if there's no room for the movement of the Spirit within you, nothing changes; nothing will happen that will make you any different afterward than you were before. So a bit of emptiness is a vital aspect of a full and meaningful worship time for you.

From all this, it's clear that at least some of what's important in your experience of worship includes:

- your choice to enter the worship space and time with your whole being,
- your active participation as more than just a spectator,
- your recognition of the intricate web of relationships in place throughout the experience,

- your willingness to have a bit of emptiness in yourself to allow space for the Spirit to enter and move and affect you.

Isn't it amazing that something that seems so simple – coming to church on a Sunday morning – is actually a surprisingly complex and intricate coming-together of so many elements of our human and spiritual selves.

Blessings,
Brian