

WHAT I BELIEVE

Diane has asked that in this coming year, members of the congregation share with others just what it is they truly believe. In response to this request, I submit the following:

I believe in a forgiving, intervening god, who in his infinite wisdom and grace, has allowed those who believe in him to have a certain amount of free will in forming their relationship with Him. And one of the manifestations of this relationship is how we show homage, i.e., worship Him.

For over three millenniums, believers in this god, first Jews and then Christians and Jews, have seen fit to set aside a portion of one day every week to give homage to this god. And this has been done as a gathering of believers, not as a personal, solitary, meditation. This making one day a week special is, of course, partly due to the commandment to keep the Sabbath holy. But I also think that sincere believers in this god, recognizing His goodness and mercy, His blessings on us and the majesty of His creation, have an innate desire to give homage, give thanks, and ask for forgiveness in the company of like believers. And to me, it seems most appropriate to do it in a place 'set aside' for this purpose.

Jesus seemed to feel this very strongly in the account of him driving out the money changers from the Temple. This is recorded in all four gospels, so someone must have thought it presented an important lesson. And no "sweet Jesus, meek and mild" here. It was whips, overturning of tables, driving out of cattle! And what had the moneychangers done? According to bible references, money changing was a legitimate, even necessary, business. One reference says they also collected taxes for the common good. Now some translations have Jesus saying they have made his Father's House a den of thieves. But others say a place of commerce. In the second chapter of John it is recorded that the disciples remembered, "Zeal for Your house will consume me" and Jesus saying "Stop making my Father's house a market place". So, in my understanding, it wasn't about money, or what was being done, but that the secular activity was being done in His "Father's house". The activities were violating the sanctity of the place 'set aside' for worship!

So what is this to us? Last time I checked we weren't selling donkeys and doves in the sanctuary. But I do feel that in our very admirable, Christian efforts to give to

the poor, provide outreach to the community and provide fellowship within the congregation, we lose sight of the fact that our sanctuary is where, we as a named community, in congregation, gather to worship All Mighty God! After all, this is the beginning of any good works we may do. I believe that if we could have even the most meager feel for His actual presence, as Jesus has promised, we might feel differently about this house of worship. And maybe even our reasons for being here. Or for not being here!

And if we feel that our house of worship is a special place of interaction between us and God, should that place not appear to be special, as a place “set aside”? Should this place, in its design, upkeep, permanence and alternative uses not say to the community, this is where All Mighty God is worshiped and given homage?

Now, I have worshiped God, in my inadequate way, in many different places: a modest Cumberland Presbyterian Church that had been supported by my ancestors; Notre Dame Cathedral, where the service was, of course, all in French; and the hanger deck of an aircraft carrier while surrounded by aircraft whose sole purpose was for killing and destruction. And I feel all of these venues were acceptable to God. So if a hanger deck full of killing machines was acceptable, why any concern about the building where we worship God?

I think that we should be concerned about the place, and our demeanor, when we worship God, solely because this is what we want to do to honor Him. I’m not sure we know what really pleases God. But I believe that if we “walk humbly with our God” we will be at least approaching what he expects of us. To me this means that when we are “formally” in His presence, as in our weekly service of worship, we present Him with our heart, soul and mind, in the most dedicated way we know, and that we have prepared ourselves, and the place we call His house, to the best of our sincere ability.

Tom Key