Sunday, October 14, 1973
THE HOW AND WHY OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP!

Recently a man said to me, “I really have trouble understanding the need for worship services such as we have in our church.” Undoubtedly there are many people who don’t know quite what to do with worship and maybe that’s largely our fault as leaders of worship in that we have not always explained how worship comes about and what it is supposed to do.

So today, in this special kind of service, we are trying to take a fresh look at Christian worship and in particular the music in our church services. We’re highlighting music because it is so much an integral part of worship. It is a kind of glue that binds the service together into a meaningful unit, and it helps set the mood.

But let’s back up a moment and take a brief look at how a service of worship such as we use is put together and then we’ll talk a little about what Christian worship is intended to do.

The planning for each Sunday morning’s service of worship begins at least a week or more in advance. For example, by tomorrow, a theme will have been chosen for next Sunday’s service. Once a theme is set, then hymns, prayers and anthems are chosen to enhance the theme. Often, the senior minister and minister of music and fine arts will discuss a number of various hymns and how they might be used in the service. We often discuss also how the order of the service might need to be changed to make that particular service more meaningful. We are very much concerned as we plan each service with timing, mood changes, the flow of the service and the sense of drama.

The basic overall outline of the service we normally use is one which has been developed by the Christian church around the world over a period of almost 2000 years and it has its roots also in the synagogue worship of the Jewish faith. Each service contains at least these ingredients--elements of praise, prayer, scripture, both read and sung, (many of the choir anthems are based on texts from the Bible), and sermon which is primarily the word of God interpreted.

But what should worship do for us? What are we to gain from it? Christian worship is meant to do several things.

1. First, worship sets us in the context of history, that is, it reminds us that we are part of a long line of people who have sought to know and follow God’s will. In our worship we ourselves become an active part of that story. In the scripture readings, in the hymns, in the sermon, we are linked to our forefathers and mothers of the faith. Taking part in worship then also reminds us that we are brothers and sisters with each other and with all human beings. We all need this reminder!

2. Secondly, worship is meant to affect us psychologically and emotionally. It is meant to touch the whole person. One reason music is so important in worship is that it can often affect us emotionally more than anything else.

The fact that worship can help our over-all well-being is being more and more realized. This past week, one of the medical doctors in our congregation sent me a short editorial from a medical magazine which said, “In a recent report of Johns Hopkins University, the relation

between church of attendance and health was reviewed and some interesting relations were uncovered. The study showed strong correlations between church attendance and certain indices of health. Church attendance has been found to correlate with personal adjustment in old age and reduced apprehension of death.

The study also showed that church goers had less tuberculosis. Attending church worship regularly by men was associated with less arteriosclerotic heart disease, less emphysema, less cirrhosis and less suicide than in infrequent church-goers." How about that!

3. Thirdly, there is an educational aspect to worship. We get a new perspective on life. We can come to see our prob-lems and joys in a different light or get new insight into a problem we face as a community or nation.

Some of you have spoken to me from time to time about the place of children in worship. Some worry that younger children may get little out of worship. And you are worried about their restlessness. Children may not be able to say specifically what they got out of worship if anything. Yet what a child may get from the service is a sense of the total experience, a sense of the sacred, a sense of the joy of the Christian faith as he hears the congregation and his parents sing and pray. In almost every case where children have had trouble with worship, or the parents thought they did, it has been found that the parents were themselves very irregular in their own worship patterns. I personally welcome children of all ages in the services of worship, and their restlessness does not bother me.

4. Fourthly, Christian worship is meant to be inspiring. The worshipper should get an uplift from having been here. This uplift comes from the fact that we have been again reminded that God is the creator and sustainer of life — that all does not depend on us alone.

The uplift and inspiration also come from seeing the world from a different perspective at least for a short time. This comes through music, through hearing the Bible again and through the sermon. In worship, we gather together to look at our problems, our joys, our situation from the Christian perspective in a very conscious way. Our faith reminds us that there are other worlds, other people, other times. We transcend ourselves and see things from another angle.

A change of perspective can be helpful in many ways. It's something like what Harry Golden, that perceptive Jewish writer from North Carolina, put it when he wrote --

"I have a rule against registering complaints in a restaurant because I know that there are at least four billion suns in the Milky Way — which is one galaxy. Many of these suns are thousands of times larger than our own, and vast millions of them have whole planetary systems, including literally billions of satellites, and all of this revolves at the rate of about a million miles an hour, like a huge oval pinwheel. Our own sun and its planets, which includes the earth, are on the edge of this wheel. This is only our own small corner of the universe, so why do not these billions of revolving and rotating suns and planets collide?

The answer is, the space is so unbelievably vast that if we reduced the suns and the planets in correct mathematical proportion with relation to the distances between them, each sun would be a speck of dust, two. three, and four thousand miles away from its nearest neighbor. And mind you, this is only the Milky Way--our own small corner, our own galaxy.

How many galaxies are there? Billions. Billions of galaxies spaced at about one million light-years part. Within the range of our biggest telescopes there are at least one hundred million

separate galaxies such as our own Milky Way, and this is not all, by any means. The scientists have found that the further you go out into space with the telescopes the thicker the galaxies become, and there are billions of billions as yet uncovered to the scientist's camera and the astrophysicist's calculations.

When you think of all this, it's silly to worry whether the waitress brought you string beans instead of limas."

Sometimes we need a different and broader perspective on our problems. Hopefully worship can set us in the context of God's view and we at least for a time see things differently.

So, I invite you to make regular worship a vital part of your life and the life of your family. I invite you to be sensitive to the various moods of the service — to note your feelings, and to participate fully in the worship. Amen.