

## **Worship & Lyrical Simplicity**

*By Dave Frincke*

The summer of 1999 changed my life forever. I was on a 10 day trip to Mexico with Concordia Lutheran Church's youth group. We were spending the first few days of our trip in Los Angeles, California to train for our time in Tijuana, Mexico. We had just seen a dramatic presentation of Jesus' trial, torture & death and were invited to come to a time of worship afterwards. As I entered into the worship area, these simple words were being sung:

“Come, now is the time to worship  
Come, now is the time to give your heart  
Come, just as you are to worship  
Come, just as you are before your God. Come.”

It was these simple lines that drew me into the Presence of God that evening. And it was that evening when the seeds of my calling and destiny were planted into my soul.

Ever since that summer I have been leading modern & contemporary forms of worship in the Lutheran Church. As you can probably imagine, this has put me in the middle of many lively discussions regarding worship. I have heard and been confronted with many objections to contemporary worship; some very credible and some completely ridiculous. I am very thankful that these objections were brought up because it forced me to search the Scriptures for answers. When you strip these objections down to their core, we're actually only left with a few. I'd like to address one of those major objections today; the objection of lyrical simplicity.

This objection has been stated many different ways; here are just a few of the statements that I've personally heard: “Contemporary worship songs don't have any spiritual meat to them; they sound like camp fire songs.” or “You just sing the same thing over and over and over!” and even “That's just a bunch of people singing those stupid choruses!” After hearing these kinds of statements for so many years, I believe that some people think that we dishonor God and treat Him as less-Holy when our songs tend to be more simplistic. I think we can all agree that we never want to treat God in those ways, but I don't believe the depth of our lyrics (or lack thereof) really pose that danger.

It is true. Just like the lyrics quoted earlier, many of the worship songs being written and sung in churches all around the world tend to be lyrically simplistic. There's nothing wrong with our songs having lyrical depth, but does simplicity make a song unqualified to be used for worship? Does God reject a song being sung with a sincere heart because it's not deep or profound? Is there a certain threshold of lyrical complexity that must be breached before worship becomes acceptable to God? When a song or a style of music is looked down upon because of its lyrical simplicity, the implied answer to these questions is “Yes!” And with that answer, we are communicating to people that God doesn't like or approve of that song. Different people have different preferences; this seems to be especially true in regards to the style of worship. There's nothing wrong with you or I disliking a song for one reason or another, but it is wrong to pass off our own preference as God's. Being a songwriter myself, it's comforting to know that God's opinion of the songs I write for Him aren't based off of someone else's preference!

I have always been struck by the events of Isaiah 6. Isaiah had an incredible vision of God on His throne. And flying right above His throne were the Seraphs. They were so close to the throne of God that they were actually covering their faces and their feet while they flew; what a sense of the holiness of God! But the Seraphs were also doing something else; they were worshipping. They were beholding the Glory of God; they were experiencing His Presence and basking in His love. And what profound, deep and lyrically complex words were they calling out in worship? "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." That's it. Simple words, but profound truth! According to some of our philosophies the Seraph's offering of worship wouldn't be acceptable in our churches today because it's too simple!

Or what about the four Living Creatures in Revelation 4 who are surrounding the throne of God? Scripture says that "Day and night they never stop saying 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.'" Every morning, every evening and for all eternity they worship using the same few phrases. Talk about repetition! That probably wouldn't make the cut in many of our churches today either. Since God doesn't rebuke the Seraphs for worshipping in simplicity or the Living Creatures for worshipping with so much repetition, why would He frown upon us when we do the same?

My whole perspective of worship changed when I began to realize that God doesn't want a selfish worshipper. I've heard it argued that the Hymns and Songs we use in worship are primarily meant to teach the faith. This is why so many of our hymns have numerous stanzas and an incredible lyrical depth. I love hymns, but I strongly object to the philosophy that their main purpose is to teach the faith. I think that the main purpose of our Hymns & Songs is to bless the heart of God; to tell Him that we love Him; to declare why we love Him. We don't sing for our benefit; we sing for His! When we start to look at our songs of Worship as primarily teaching tools, our hearts may tend to disengage from Who we're singing to. We can so easily be distracted by what we're receiving during worship, that we forget that we've come primarily to give God our praise & thanksgiving. If our focus is on what we get when we come to church, then we've become selfish worshippers.

Whether the words are simple or profound, I think it's really the content & authenticity of the worshipper that matter to God. I think too often we allow our own preferences to be the leading voice in our spiritual evaluations. Maybe our outlook would change if we tried to see things from God's perspective a little more often. Authentic worship doesn't have to be complex. A simple "Jesus, I love You." can touch the heart of God just as much as singing all 8 beautiful stanzas of "Abide with Me". I think we can learn a lesson from the Seraphs and the Living Creatures.