

MISSIONAL

WORSHIP

IN A

PIONEER

CONTEXT

TIM WATSON

Copyright

Published 2018 by Tim Watson

www.beatliturgist.com

Copyright of text and images

© Tim Watson

Design: Tim Watson

The content is licensed under a creative commons attribution – non-commercial – sharealike 2.0 license. In practice this means the author grants permission for the images and texts to be used and remixed creatively and with imagination for non-commercial purposes. Please attribute the work to the author.

For any other use please contact the author via

www.twitter.com/BeatLiturgist or revtimwatson@Hotmail.com

INTRODUCTION

In pioneer circles much is written and said, about the process of discernment about *how* to gather, *when* to gather, *where* to gather. Attention is even paid to the question of *why* gather at all. When it comes to the question of “*what* to do” once people are gathered much is said and written about how to facilitate spaces of community, how to engage with others and how to build community together.

Less is written about what worship looks / sounds / smells / tastes / feels like. Even in the most pioneering contexts when a ‘time of worship’ begins it is easy to fall back into a default position of guitar-led musical worship with a spoken-presentation of some form.

This little booklet hopes to articulate some simple principles that might enable further creativity in worship, or at the least, be a conversation starter as to what worship might look like in a pioneer context. Note that this booklet is made up of a few principles (there are countless more). The booklet seeks to directly address the reader and is begging for a response.

At the end of this little booklet are some resources relating to worship and context that might be of interest.

1. A NEED TO LAY DOWN OWN PREFERENCES AND INNOVATE

As ministers (lay/ordained) we might have a preference of what worship looks / sounds / feels like. We need to be prepared to lay down our preferences.

Coldplay-esque guitar anthems might help us encounter the living God, but do they help the community we are ministering to/with?

We must be prepared to ask ourselves difficult questions about the worship “baggage” we bring and about what will most enable those we encounter to engage with the living God.

2. CONTEXTUALLY APPROPRIATE

WORSHIP

To offer contextually sensitive worship the person leading worship needs to know the community and the context in which they are leading worship. If a high percentage of the local population speaks a number of different languages, word heavy worship might not be appropriate.

Maybe there is a specific subculture that may respond better to more culturally sensitive forms of worship.

What are the contextually significant factors that might shape the worship we lead or co-lead?

To really know this, requires really knowing the community.

3. BEWARE OF FRANCHISE

MODELS OF DOING WORSHIP

When thinking about engaging your community with church worship we must be careful not to decide to put on a particular big-brand form of worship without taking time to reflect on whether such worship is the best fit for our communities.

It may be tempting to put on a particular form of branded worship, but we must ask ourself why we are doing it. Just because it works elsewhere doesn't mean it will work in our context. (At the same time don't presume we always need to re-invent the wheel).

Remember, while a worship brand name might be known to church attenders, presumably we are seeking to engage people who don't currently go to church (and so may well not know the brand name anyway).

We must be prepared to reflect how you might take principles from branded forms of worship and adapt them for our own contexts.

4. BEWARE OF LABELLED FORMS OF WORSHIP

It is important to be sensitive when seeking to express what 'style' of worship we might initiate.

It might be that we decide to initiate 'cafe church'. We must be aware that the phrase 'cafe church' has more than one definition. What we think it is might not be what others think it is.

When we say 'cafe church' do we mean:

- a hymn/sermon service with some discussion that is based around small tables in a church building
- an after-hours time of guitar-led worship and testimony in a commercial cafe that is open especially for the worship
- an informal church gathering in a commercial cafe during regular opening hours
- a church service taking place in a church-owned cafe that may well be attached to the church building

Beware of labels.

5. SPEAK FROM YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE AND ENABLE DIALOGUE

It is important to lead contextually appropriate worship, yet it is also important to do so with integrity. We must pay attention to our own story, pay attention to our own experience and be prepared to be vulnerable. If the Church hopes to build deep roots in local communities it must be willing to reach out with openness.

When we reach out with honesty, openness and humility we can create an environment where dialogue is nurtured and transformative.

6. RECOGNISE THE ROLE NARRATIVE HAS TO PLAY IN WORSHIP

We need take time to think about the narratives that flow through our communities.

As we do this, we need to reflect on the stories that bind our existing church community together. We need to ask ourselves how we might shape worship that enables those we regularly engage with to grow in faith.

A former missional community I co-led was made up of dispersed people who lived across a large town. We gathered two times a week and recognised that people rarely saw each other throughout the rest of the week. As a result members of the community co-wrote *Lighting Beacons: A Liturgy For Life* which is a liturgy that could be used individually on the train or at home, or together with one or two others, or as a whole community. The liturgy was made available in a single pocket-size book as well as online.

7. NOT FLASHY – RELATIONAL

When crafting worship it is tempting to create a slick presentation with incredible graphics, the best sound production possible and an incredible hipster lighting rig.

Production values may be important to us. They may even be important to some weencounter. But ultimately, what will keep people returning is faithful worship that is rooted in relationships.

Movies, the internet, YouTube, Vimeo, stadium gigs. If people want to be wowed into transcendent experience there are plenty of places to engage.

With the presence of social media added to the mix there are plenty of avenues open to people.

The real strength of a physical gathering of people lies in the relationships that can be built over a good coffee and the experience of worship that catches the imagination and yet at the same time is rooted with the people present.

8. WHAT PRESUPPOSITIONS DO WE BRING ABOUT WORSHIP

When we think about what worship is and what worship is like, do we ever ask what drives our understanding of worship?

In different denominations there might be a movement to look to the past, to tradition. Yet even in doing this do we ask what that even means.

In different denominations, when people people speaking about “keeping our traditions” do they mean the traditions that were put in place in 1928? Or the Victorian era, or the 1660’s, or the 1050’s? How far in the past do we have to look to find what ‘traditional’ really is?

Go back far enough into the early church’s history and ‘traditional’ begins to look like sitting in a room and eating together. Yet when people across the denominations talk about ‘traditional’ worship this might not be what they mean.

9. THE ROLE OF ANCIENT – FUTURE

As we reflect on our contexts we need to listen deeply to the narratives of the people we encounter.

We need to be attentive to the collective and individual journeys the people we engage with are on.

With that in mind we may need to be ready to create immersive worship that meets the community where it is at. To do this we must be willing to innovate.

Yet as part of our innovation, we must also be open to the great treasury of worship that came before us. We must be prepared to mine the traditions and find within the practices and disciplines to reconnect with and reimagine.

Eucharist. Silence. Feasts and fasts. Lectio divina. Retreat. Pilgrimage. The Jesus prayer.

10. CREATING SPACE FOR PRAISE AND LAMENT

Some forms of Christian musical worship are overflowing with praise for God, praise for creation, praise for the victory of the cross. Praise for Jesus' righteousness.

These songs and forms of worship delve into the richness of Easter and shout of the victory of Good Friday and the magnificence of Resurrection Sunday.

Far too easily we step over the awkwardness of the end of Good Friday and ignore Holy Saturday altogether.

We praise and praise and praise.

And yet so many we encounter feel distant from praise, so many we encounter live out Holy Saturday day after day after day.

In rediscovering lament and in making room for it within our worship, we may well give voice to many who have felt voiceless and forgotten.

11. NOT WORSHIP LEADERS BUT CURATORS, GUIDES AND FELLOW PILGRIMS

Missional worship asks us to consider our practices. It asks us to rethink our roles as leaders.

Leaders with all the answers.

Leaders who are experts.

Instead missional worship requires us to be curators. Making space for the narratives to be made known. Gathering together fragments of the story and bringing the focus back to the story being told and taking the focus away from us.

When we curate worship we hold the space, we facilitate and we share in the story.

Curators are guides who show the way without carrying the participants. Guides walk alongside the participants as fellow pilgrims on the way

12. COLLABORATIVE

As we go about the process of curating worship we need to do so from a posture of openness.

Just as gallery curators work with artists to build up the narrative of an exhibition those who 'lead' worship should seek to work with fellow pilgrims to create worship experiences that recognise the importance of another's experience.

Collaborative worship embodies this openness as it shaped by more than one person's experience.

13. EXPERIENTIAL WORSHIP – PARTICIPATORY – MULTI – SENSORY

Missional worship must hold within it the possibility of engaging participants in many ways.

We must not see worshippers as ‘attendees’ or as a congregation on the receiving end of our worship leading and expertise.

Rather we must engender a culture that enables participation. In doing this we must seek to infuse worship with elements that will engage participants.

We need to take seriously the truth that people have different learning styles and respond to difference sensory experiences in different ways.

To engage the soul we must engage the eyes, ears, mouth, nose, finger-tips and toes as well as the brain.

14. SPACE

Missional worship creates the opportunity to make creative use of physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual space.

Such worship encourages the create use of space. Chairs no longer line up in rows facing in a single direction.

There may be no chairs at all.

The space may be outside, on a mountaintop or on a beach.

More than this practical controlling of space, missional worship also creates opportunities to hold a space, to create an emotional and spiritual moment that might be described as a thin place.

When space is being held, the hope is not to control the space, forcing our will upon other participants, but rather create a space where participants are enabled to experience something transcendent.

15. HOSTS AND GUESTS

We need to recognise the power associated with place. When we host worship in church buildings we will struggle to create neutral space. Whoever attends such attractional worship will naturally take on the role of guest.

Even when we co-create incarnational worship in a neutral space like a pub or a park, the people curating the worship are still the hosts, even if the contrast between host and guest is lessened.

If we can, we should seek to use spaces with a sense of shared ownership. Or perhaps we might go further and take the risk of becoming guests in the homes and club houses of others.

To be a guest is to adopt a posture of vulnerability. Guests rely on the hospitality of hosts. In becoming guests we may actually find a forum where our voice may be heard.

16. OPEN-SOURCE

As we share in the process of growing together in faith with our communities we will over time develop new forms of worship with other participants in our communities.

This process is by nature generative and the more we seek to collaborate and encourage participation the more new forms of worship and reimaginings of ancient worship will be birthed from within.

As the archive of liturgies, alt-worship services, communion rites and other expressions of faith are poured out we will ultimately need to come to a decision as to what is to be done with them.

We might seek to adapt some services to create the next new branded form of worship, but who really wants that?

While the new forms of worship developed may be contextually specific to us and communities, there may be elements that could empower other communities.

With that in mind we could seek to share our ideas and encourage them to be remixed for different contexts.

17. SUBVERSIVE

Missional worship should pay attention to the formational role it will play in shaping the faith and lived out discipleship of those who share in its story.

If we recognise the formational nature of worship, we must also recognise the need for the worship we curate to hold a mirror up to the injustices present in our society.

Missional worship should not be afraid to take a stand against societal injustices and through experiential and participatory engagement create worship experiences that are challenging and unnerving.

Missional worship can and must also play a significant role in reimagining and evoking a fresh, kingdom vision of what the world could become.

18. A NOTE: DENOMINATIONAL RESTRICTIONS

It is important to note that many pioneer communities are rooted in traditions that have liturgical guidelines or even restrictions.

While it would be improper to advocate ignoring such guidelines and restrictions it is imperative that missional worship does not lose its power to engage, perturb, disrupt, empower and enable flourishing.

Denominational liturgical guidelines or restrictions are no doubt in place based on many years of sound theological reasoning.

That said, where necessary, improvise. For a healthy discussion of this very issue do take note of the introduction to the Grace community's introduction in their *Making Communion* book.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baker, Jonny, *Curating Worship* (London: SPCK, 2010).
- Baker, Jonny & Dean Ayres, 'Introduction' in *Grace Pocket Liturgies, Making Communion* (London: Proost, 2012), 7-28.
- Bolger, Ryan K. (ed.), *The Gospel after Christendom* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2012).
- Brewin, Kester, *Signs of Emergence* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 2007).
- Cray, Graham, Ian Mobsby & Aaron Kennedy (eds.), *New Monasticism as Fresh Expression of Church* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2010).
- Croft, Steven & Ian Mobsby, *Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Tradition* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2009).
- Donovan, Vincent J., *Christianity Rediscovered* (London: SCM Press, 2001).
- Freeman, Andy & Pete Greig, *Punk Monk* (Eastbourne: Survivor, 2007).
- Frost, Michael & Alan Hirsch, *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2009).
- Frost, Michael & Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things To Come* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 2013).

- Giles, Richard, *Creating Uncommon Worship* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2004).
- Gray-Reeves, Mary & Michael Perham, *The Hospitality of God* (London: SPCK, 2011).
- Marti, Gerardo & Gladys Ganiel, *The De-Constructed Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- Murray, Stuart, *Church After Christendom* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004).
- Pierson, Mark, *The Art of Curating Worship* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2012).
- Ross, Cathy & Jonny Baker (eds.), *Pioneering Spirituality* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2015).
- Smith, James K. A., *Desiring The Kingdom* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2009).
- Standing, Roger, *As a Fire By Burning* (London: SCM Press, 2013).
- Ward, Pete, *Liquid Church* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002).
- Ward, Pete (ed.), *Mass Culture* (Abingdon: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2008).
- Webber, Robert E., *Ancient-Future Worship* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 2008).
- Woods, Dot, Josh Walker & Tim Watson, *Lighting Beacons: A Liturgy For Life* (2015) www.lighting-beacons-liturgy.com
- Pocket Liturgies series available from www.proost.co.uk

