

'Worship: A Communal Spiritual Exercise'

Well, the Examen is an individual Spiritual Exercise. It's something we do on our own. However, Spiritual Exercises are not just individual activities. Spiritual Exercises are communal too – some involve the whole community of faith.

There's one communal Spiritual Exercise that all of us here are doing right now. It's so simple that most of us don't even consider it to be a Spiritual Exercise. I'm talking about worship. That's right, being together in Christian worship is a fundamental spiritual exercise. It is perhaps the core Spiritual Exercise that is the foundation for all the rest. So, just by worshipping here in this Christian community we are practicing this communal Spiritual Exercise.

Let me tell about my experience of worship in the Christian community that I was part of while I was away. At the Ignatius Jesuit Center, worship was offered 7 days a week at 11:30 a.m. There was singing, prayers, scripture readings, a homily and the eucharist or mass. All of us attended. Attendance was optional, but all of us gathered together. Forty-five minutes later we were finished and ready for lunch. As one of seven Protestants among the twenty-one participants in the program we were warmly welcome to take part in the full service.

So, essentially I worshipped within that specific Christian community for forty days. It was a fascinating community. Those present came from all around the world – about a third from Canada, a third from the USA and a third from other countries – the U.K., Australia and parts of Asia. In addition there was the resident community of Jesuits and others were present as well. We all showed up for worship.

Although we spent much of our time together in silence, I felt very close to all those present. I sensed that we were a small part of the wider global Body of Christ in that place and time. Gathering to worship together was a core spiritual exercise.

We here at Kamloops United Church are like this too. Now, I know that we come to worship on Sunday mornings for a variety of reasons. Sometimes it's spiritual. Sometimes it's social. Sometimes it's just routine. Yet, in some ways it doesn't really matter what our individual reasons are. What counts is that we gather and we offer our worship. We come together to form a Christian community that is connected to the wider Body of Christ across time and space.

Sometimes, we don't always feel like coming to worship. I recall hearing a story once about a husband and wife who enjoyed going to Sunday service. They attended regularly. However, one Sunday one morning the husband was very tired so he just stayed in bed. In the meantime his wife was up and getting ready. She wondered why he wasn't getting ready too. She opened the bedroom door and said, 'Come on Harry, it's time to get up, we're going to be late for church.' The man just rolled over and slept. Ten minutes later his wife opened the bedroom door again and with more urgency she said, 'Get up sleepyhead, it's getting late. We're going to miss Church.' The man rolled

over again. Five minutes later his wife came into the bedroom, and said in a very loud voice. 'Listen Harry, you've got to get up for church right now. We can't be late!' And Harry half asleep said, 'Why not?' His wife replied, 'Harry, don't you remember – you're the minister!'

The comedian Woody Allen once said that eighty percent of life is just 'showing up.' And Church is like that too. Sometimes there are days when we are really struggling with our faith. At those times we need those around us to reassure us and to give us strength to carry on. And conversely there are days when we are feeling strong in our faith and we can lend some of that strength to those around us. We really do need each other in our Christian community together. Worshipping together is a core Spiritual Exercise. Thanks be to God!

Reverend Bruce Comrie