

"But when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." - John 12:32 NIV

I have been going through old files. Looking at the notes I have made, thoughts I have written down and notes from meetings and events. It is interesting to see what was important to me then and what is important now. Trying to figure out why I even thought this or that and wondering the reasons behind some of the notes has been a challenge. One page of notes came from another life (i.e. another congregation). We were talking about worship. Ideas were being generated about what role worship plays in our lives and what we could do to enhance it. And, of course, someone said we needed a praise band with choruses every Sunday — we did have one that played occasionally and a group that sang with them — they were rather good. However, for this one person this was the only way to truly worship.

There were other ideas. Some good. Some easily dismissed (longer sermons!). What we failed to address or what I failed to note was the whole concept of — what is worship? It was after I read these notes that I found Leonard's Sweet's quote posted by a colleague on Facebook (quoted at the bottom of this page). And, it has pushed me again to think about worship — what is our goal in worship? Does it matter if there is a pipe organ, a piano or a praise band? Does it matter if there is a children's message? Can we worship without an offering? Can we worship without a sanctuary? Can we worship alone?

My mind went to the verse used at the top of these ramblings. Jesus, for me, is indicating that if we want life or worship to be meaningful it is he that must be lifted up. It is not the church, not the pastor, not the music leader or anything else. It is not the denominational stance of the week. It is not the upcoming church retreat or even what the government is or is not doing — it is Christ lifted up? Or, I would rather say, it is the whole character of God which we find in Christ lifted high before us and before the world throughout he prayers, hymns and words of worship?

Jesus said, "I will..." It is when we are lifting Christ high in deed and action and when it is he that is seen and not us that people are truly drawn to the faith — the Christ. We need to be lifting high the living Christ and not ourselves. A dear friend and colleague, now at home with Christ, served as an evangelist in down east Maine during the late 1930's and 1940's. He told of going to a town and one of the leading men in town, one not friendly toward religion, cornered him and said, "Harold, I saw one of your converts drunk in a ditch the other night." Harold said he replied, "You probably did, but if he had been one of Christ's converts he wouldn't have been there!"

I am also reminded of a great African-American preacher I heard many years ago. He said it something like this: *"When you are walking down the street in the dark of night and you hear footsteps behind you, you should not be concerned with the color of the person's skin but in the condition of their heart."* If we apply this to our worship service: It is not the type of music, the personality of the preacher, etc. but the condition of **our** hearts as we enter into worship and the emphasis must be on who we are worshipping, not we are worshipping and living our lives.

Worship isn't about getting God to show up. That's Baal-ism. Worship is about getting us to show up for God.
-Leonard Sweet