

Spiritual Disciplines

Liturgy Worship

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12-26-10

Introduction

In our discussion of Christian disciplines we have talked about prayer, spiritual reading, and tradition. All three of these disciplines are part of a longer list of disciplines found in Robert Mulholland's book, *Invitation to a Journey*. They include:

- Prayer, which is the way we communicate with God.
- Spiritual reading, which keeps the truth of God's Word before us.
- Tradition, which helps us to remember how God has worked in the past.
- Worship, which keeps us focused on God in our daily lives.
- Daily office, which includes a daily time of personal devotion.
- Study, which is "disciplined growth in our knowledge and experience of God, ourselves, and the world around us". (3)
- Fasting, which "is the separation of ourselves from something in order to

offer ourselves in greater measure to God". (3)

- Retreat, which is a time when "we allow God to help us reevaluate the whole structure of our life in Christ." A retreat is a "time to stand aside and allow God to show us what we are doing and what we ought to be doing". (3)

Most of us are familiar with these Christian disciplines but I want to cover one more of them in greater detail: Worship.

While worship is considered one of the many Christian spiritual disciplines, I believe it can be listed as that under which all other spiritual disciplines are aspects. In other words, prayer, spiritual reading, tradition, daily office, study, fasting and retreat are all different aspects of our worship of God.

There are two kinds of worship, corporate and individual, and both of them are necessary. You could apply these two kinds of worship to each of the different aspects of worship.

For example, it is important to participate in both corporate and individual study. In our individual study, God is able to speak to us making personal application of what we study. This personal application is important in the context of our unique life which is unlike any other life on earth.

It is also important to have corporate study so that we have accountability in our application of the knowledge of God and His word.

I like the way Robert Mulholland defines worship. He says that worship, both corporate and individual, "is the practice of regularly seeking to bring the complete focus of our being upon God. The pressures of life and the assaults of the fallen world constantly blur our focus and tend to shift us away from our center in God. Worship is the means by which we recover our focus and return to our center." (3)

There are two passages of Scripture that can help us understand worship as Jesus taught it to the people of His day:

- The feeding of the 5000
- Jesus walking on the water

In the book of John, Jesus is instructing the crowds on worship as focus on God as the center of their lives.

In Matthew's account of Jesus walking on water, He trying to get the disciples to understand worship as focus on God as the center of their lives.

1. The Crowds

First, the crowds of people.

In John's account of the feeding of the 5000 and Jesus walking on water, he records Jesus' attempt to show the people that the real focus of life is not on the things we desire and seek. Our real focus in life must be God.

Just to orient us, here is a concise outline of John chapter six:

- Verses 1-14: Jesus feeds the five thousand
- Verses 15-25: Jesus walks on water
- Verses 26-40: Jesus tries to get the people to see the importance of focusing on God instead of things.

It is not necessary to cover every single verse in this passage at this time. I encourage you to look at all the verses of these passages in John and Matthew in your devotions this next week.

If there is an important emphasis for the new year, it is found in the details of these passages.

However, there are some key verses that will help us to see the direction Jesus would have us take as we start a new year.

The emphasis in life is to be worship, whether we are part of the crowds

following Jesus, or disciples involved in a more intimate way in following Him.

In His attempt to help the crowds focus on God as the center of their lives, Jesus tried to get across the idea that worship is not about the spectacular.

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

John 6:2 (NASB)

[2] A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick.

The great crowd is following Jesus because they have seen Him healing the sick. They follow Jesus because of the possibility of the spectacular. Who needs health insurance and drugs when you have Jesus?

Now after teaching them, Jesus feeds them, five thousand men, plus women and children.

John 6:14 (NASB)

[14] Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."

Clearly their focus was on this life and this world.

John 6:15 (NASB)

[15] So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.

The crowd wants to force Jesus to be their king because He can do the spectacular. Jesus can heal them of their sicknesses and feed them.

I'm sure the pull to be popular and powerful was a real temptation to Jesus as a human.

Jesus avoids the crowd and goes off to be alone. His focus was always on centering His will on doing His Father's will. Jesus turns down the chance be spectacular.

Jesus Walks on Water

John 6:24 (NASB)

[24] So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves got into the small boats, and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus.

The next day the crowd goes looking for Jesus and finds Him. They question where He has been and how He got to this side of the lake.

John 6:26 (NASB)

[26] Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.

Jesus understood why they were seeking Him. They did not see the signs. Oh, they saw the miracles. They loved being healed and fed, but they didn't see the signs. What did Jesus mean by this?

The Greek word used here for "sign (g4592)' is used of "miracles" and wonders as signs of divine authority, it is often translated as miracles". (2)

Literally, Jesus was saying, "You seek Me, not because you saw signs which confirm My divine authority, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled." The crowds wanted the spectacular.

We are often excited about life when things are going well. Life is spectacular when I, my loved ones, and my friends are healthy. When we have food, shelter, clothing, and the extra things in life that please us, life is spectacular.

But when something goes wrong, we want God to do the spectacular. We want Him to heal us and feed us. When we come to a worship service, we want the spectacular.

Yet Jesus tries to get the crowds to understand that satisfaction in life and true worship are not found in the spectacular.

Then Jesus tries to capture their focus and turn it toward God as the center of their lives.

John 6:27 (NASB)

[27] "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal."

John 6:28 (NASB)

[28] Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?"

John 6:29 (NASB)

[29] Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."

Believe in Me, in my divine authority.

John 6:30 (NASB)

[30] So they said to Him, "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform?"

The crowd had a desire for the spectacular. I hope you understand that the desire for the spectacular never ends.

When we are looking for the spectacular and it happens, it leaves us looking for something even more spectacular. The spectacular is almost always self serving.

Think about what the crowd had witnessed. They had seen Jesus healing every kind of sickness. They had experienced the miracle of His feeding more than five thousand of them. Still, they craved more:

"Wow! Jesus has healed us He has effortlessly fed us. I wonder what He's going to do next for us? Let's make Him king, and then He can take care of everything."

Jesus tried again to get the crowd to focus on God as the center of their lives.

John 6:35-36 (NASB)

[35] Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst. [36] "But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe.

When I am reading about the things that Jesus did in His public ministry, I often try to imagine how I might have reacted

differently than the crowds of people in Jesus' day.

What makes you and me think that we would have reacted any differently than the crowds of Jesus' day? A close evaluation of our lives will soon reveal that we probably would not have been much different than they were.

We all crave the spectacular in our lives but Jesus would have us crave Him. Jesus would have us focus on God as the center of our daily lives just like He tried to get the people of His day to do.

II. The Disciples

If you compare Matthew and John's accounts of Jesus' walking on the water, you will find some differences. Matthew gives more detail about the incident, by showing us Peter walking on the water.

In Matthew's account of Jesus walking on the water, there is an emphasis on Jesus' attempt to get the disciples to focus on God as the center of their lives.

First a quick outline of Matthew 14.

- Verses 1-12 John the Baptist is beheaded.
- Verses 15-21 Jesus feeds the five thousand

- Verses 22-27 Jesus walks on water
- Verses 28-33 Peter walks on water

Let's look at some key verses in Matthew 14.

Verses 1-12 John the Baptist is beheaded

Matthew 14:13 (NASB)

[13] Now when Jesus heard about John, He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself; and when the people heard of this, they followed Him on foot from the cities.

When Jesus hears the news about John's death, He goes into a time of seclusion. Remember Mulholland's definition of a retreat? A retreat is a time when "we allow God to help us reevaluate the whole structure of our life in Christ." A retreat is a "time to stand aside and allow God to show us what we are doing and what we ought to be doing". (3)

I'm sure the news about John's horrible death filled Jesus with grief and pain.

Not only was John His cousin, but the gruesome death must have been a reminder to Jesus about His own impending torture and death.

Being truly human, I'm sure that in the garden on the night He was arrested was

not the only time and place that Jesus thought about the price He was going to have to pay for the salvation of mankind.

Driven by grief and fear, Jesus got into a boat by Himself and went out onto the lake for a time of retreat. Just like us, Jesus needed to stand aside and allow God to show Him what He needed to do. Jesus needed direction, encouragement and courage.

When is the last time you got away to be alone with God for a time of retreat? We seem to just carry on the daily tasks of life by dealing with whatever comes at us on that particular day.

At night we collapse into bed exhausted and wondering where the time went. We have no time or energy to do anything new and different because we are prisoners of our routine. Perhaps it is time for a personal retreat.

Feeling refreshed, encouraged and strengthened, Jesus went back to the shore.

Matthew 14:14 (NASB)

[14] When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick.

Bringing our concerns and circumstances to God gives us a compassion for the

concerns and circumstances of others.

When God refreshes, encourages, and strengthens us, we desire those same benefits for others.

Verses 15-21: Jesus feeds five thousand men plus women and children.

Matthew 14:19 (NASB)

[19] Ordering the people to sit down on the grass, He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food, and breaking the loaves He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds,

This blessing was a prayer of thanks to God in heaven above. This was Jesus' way of acknowledging and teaching that God is the source of everything.

Verses 22-27: Jesus walks on water.

Matthew 14:23 (NASB)

[23] After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.

Getting away from the crowds, the disciples and the tasks of ministry to be alone with God was a common thing for Jesus.

Verses 28-33: Peter walks on water.

Matthew 14:28-33 (NASB)

[28] Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." [29] And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

[30] But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

[31] Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" [32] When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. [33] And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"

Look at verse 30. Seeing the wind, Peter lost His focus on Jesus and began to sink. Remember Mulholland's definition of worship? "Regularly seeking to bring the complete focus of our being upon God." (3)

Peter lost his focus at the sight of the storm. Back to Mulholland's definition of worship. "The pressures of life and the assaults of the fallen world constantly blur our focus and tend to shift us away from our center in God." (3)

Peter cried out as he began to sink.

Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of Peter. Again, back to Mulholland's definition of worship.

"Worship is the means by which we recover our focus and return to our center." (3)

Conclusion

"It is marvelous to be captured by one emphasis. It settles all the issues of life; it determines every decision. It brings peace to every argument; it injects purpose to life." Dr. Stephen Manley

John tells us that the crowds demanded further signs before they would believe in Jesus' divine authority. They wanted an ever increasing diet of the spectacular that could never be satisfied because its focus was self centered.

Peter's focus was on doing the spectacular: "Wow! If I could just walk on water like Jesus did."

Jesus invited Peter to come out on the water not to experience the spectacular but to experience God. When the storm overwhelmed Peter's expectations of the spectacular, his focus shifted to the inevitable - sinking.

You see, even standing on solid ground, the strongest man can be overwhelmed by a storm. How much more can a man standing on top of the water be overwhelmed?

Jesus wanted Peter to experience God so that he would not be overwhelmed by the storms in life.

Worship is all about experiencing God, not the spectacular. The more we worship, the more focused on God as the center of our life we will be.

All the disciples in the boat gasp, "You are certainly God's Son." Suddenly, their focus on God as the center in their lives at that moment was recaptured.

No doubt they had seen the great miracles and heard the teachings of Jesus. Like the rest of the people they would have seen Jesus as the greatest teacher and miracle worker in life.

I don't think the disciples were much different than most of the people in the great crowds that followed Jesus. It is no secret that the disciples thought that this great teacher and healer would set up an earthly kingdom.

Their focus, like that of the crowds, was on the great miracles and the spectacular. Jesus had just brought them back to the proper focus. The focus was not the miracles and teachings of Jesus, but instead, the Heavenly Father.

2011 is upon us. Will it be different than 2010? Will we be like the crowds who sought Jesus for the spectacular? Will we be like Peter who did the spectacular? Or will we worship God, daily seeking to bring our focus to Him as the center of our lives?

Will 2011 be different for you?

How will it be different?

Resources:

1. NASB - New American Standard Bible (NASB). Cedar Rapids: Laridian, 2002.
2. CWS-NT - AMG Complete Word Study Dictionary - New Testament (CWS_NT). Cedar Rapids: Laridian Electronic Publishing, 2007.
3. Mulholland, M. Robert Jr., Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation, Downers Grove, Illinois, InterVarsity Press, 1993.