

## **Worship for Young Adults** **by Dr. Quincy D. Brown**

Congregations have tried to articulate how to reach young adults through worship. Here are some things to remember when designing a worship service focused on young adults:

- Worship is giving honor and praise to God
- Worship effects a new relationship between God and the young adult
- Worship mediates God's grace to us
- Worship expresses and embodies God's presence
- Worship "offers Christ for human acceptance"
- Worship is the communal living out of the kingdom on earth
- Worship is the "offering of our whole selves to God"
- Worship empowers us to move out into the world as disciples of God's love

While each congregation may emphasize one of the understandings of worship more than others, in reality, the depth of the worship experience has the potential of holding these diverse meanings in tension and in unity.

### **Identity Quest**

According to Erik H. Erikson, the task of young adulthood is to discover *identity* and *intimacy*, or relationships. Identity is a word with which most of us are familiar. Our identity is who we are as persons. Identity can be a tricky thing, though. The trick is that sometimes it can be very hard to find our identity.

During this journey of identity, young adults will shed familiar ways of life and take on other ways. For example, young adulthood, especially the college years, is when students will begin to alter their views about the world, others, politics, and religion. But during this vulnerable time, young adults are also able to discover themselves by listening to God's calling in their lives. Many times, God's call will articulate the themes of their life's story. And, like all good stories, young adulthood has a series of plots.

Trying to figure out the direction of their life's story means that they must ask questions: Who am I? Who does God say that I am? What am I to do with my life? Will my life matter? and What's God's will for my life?

### **Worship as Guide**

Consequently, worship for young adults who are struggling with these questions must guide them and help them to live out their questions as a faithful response to the Gospel. To put it another way, worship needs to help young adults with the issues of identity and intimacy—relationships. Such a worship experience will point to both a vertical relationship with God and a horizontal relationship with one another.

In the vertical relationship of worship, we give honor and praise to God; we offer our whole selves to God and develop a new identity and relationship with the Almighty. God then blesses us with grace, strength, faith and assurance. In the horizontal relationship with one another, we develop intimacy as we work

together toward the communal living out of God's kingdom on earth, empowering one another to be Disciples.

### **John Wesley and the Importance of the Cross**

The intersection between the vertical and horizontal aspects of worship—identity and intimacy—forms a cross. Ultimately, this means that effective worship to and for young adults will have to provide an experience of the Holy.

This is what John Wesley, the father of Methodism, understood to be the process of formation of “holiness of heart and life.” This includes a worship expression that helps the young adult to grow in their love of God (the inner world of heart and soul) and in love of neighbor and all creation (the outer world of life and spirit). Wesley's emphasis on the holiness of “heart” and “life” implies that growth in faith has to do with our total existence—both inner and outer. Such a view stems from the root of the word *holy* which is similar with the word *whole*.

### **God's Story and Our Stories**

The emphasis on holiness or wholeness is especially important in the stories from the Bible. This doesn't mean that worship should merely focus on abstract concepts from the Bible like salvation, grace, faith, and so on. Rather, worship, if it is to be effective to young adults, must focus on concrete experiences of the heart. Jesus, of course, understood this truth as he was a master storyteller. Storytelling creates community since it takes listeners into the realm of their imagination—a powerful and engaging part of the mind/soul.

Our image-laden stories provide an inner lens that gives us meaning and that influences what we do in any given situation. Such stories, as it relates to worship, are really an internal system of images, plots, and emotions which acts as a template. Like a seal stamping a king's insignia into wax, stories imprint our unique of integrating reality into our experience.

### **Conclusion**

Young adults need to know that their lives have meaning and purpose. Their search for identity and intimacy during the years of 18-35 is essential in their understanding of themselves, others, the world and God. Through meaningful worship, that addresses issues of vocation and relationships with God, the world, and others, young adults are able to find their place in the church.

Undoubtedly, there will arise many occasions when young adults will need to edit their stories of faith and life. These opportunities are God-moments, for they are filled with God's continuing presence and work in life. Much like the unfolding of a book which precedes one chapter at a time, God is ever at work, calling, shaping, editing, retelling, and rounding out young adults so that they may become the persons that God has created them to be.