



# Pinewood Lutheran Church

24 Wilmington Rd.  
Burlington, Massachusetts 01803

Office Phone: (781) 273-1610  
Evangelical Lutheran Synod

## PINEWOOD PRESS February 2010

### **The Pastor's Diary:**

Monday, p.m.

I first heard it about 18 years ago. One member, a former military man, was talking about people missing church worship. He opined out loud that perhaps they were worshipping "Saint. Mattress." That little phrase has stuck with me over the years. Today I would add these to it: Saint Hockey, Saint Wrestling, Saint Football, or Saint I've Had a Bad Week, I Need a Break.

Oh, oh, here comes the pastor's diatribe about missing church! Before any of you speed read over the upcoming sentences, take a deep breath! I'm not going to beat up on you emotionally and lay a guilt trip on you. I just want to remind everyone of the wonderful truths and blessings that stem from Christian worship and the background behind it all.

In our sound byte, instant gratification age, Divine worship services seem an anachronism from days gone by. That's why so many churches have adopted "contemporary" services which vary greatly in style and scope. Some merely update language and use more modern hymns. Others employ rock bands, have a Starbucks booth in the hall, ignore the sacraments, and employ a motivational speaker instead of a pastor. Today such services come in all shapes and sizes. Their chief motivation seems to be in trying to be relevant to the modern world. But in doing so, are they still being relevant to God?

Most people think that God is just like they are. He has the same likes and dislikes that they have. He has the same emotional response to things that they feel. If that were true, God would be no bigger than they are. If that were true, than God would be exactly like us—albeit a bit older. Remember the first commandment: "Don't make God in your own image."? Do many attempts at worshipping Him today do exactly that? Well, I think you know the answer.

Taking God seriously means taking His Word, the truths He reveals about Himself, seriously. And throughout the Bible, God lays down such truths when it comes to worshipping Him. "Keep the day of rest holy." "To obey is better than to sacrifice." "Teach them to observe everything I have commanded." "Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together." "Serve the Lord." Both the Old Testament Church and the New Testament Church took those commands to heart and built traditional worship services around them. If you read the Psalms, you know that many of them were composed to be sung at worship time. Since they are inspired by God, and therefore have His stamp of approval, the early Christians used them, built upon their truths, and so much of our modern/traditional worship style comes down to us today.

Historically, Godly worship is primarily about Him honoring us and our response to such a blessing—us honoring Him. Thus, it has both sacramental (He comes to us) and

sacrificial (we go to Him) elements. Recall here that the sacramental elements: preaching, absolution, baptism, and the Lord's Supper are all directly commanded by God in the Bible. Thus, to serious believers, none of them are optional. Also recall that these sacramental elements are pure love in action. God comes to forgive us, strengthen us in our faith, teach us divine truths and uplift our souls. In this regard, sacramental=gospel. It equals grace. And grace is the only thing that distinguishes us from idol worshippers. Verve, zeal, emotionalism, and sacrifice don't distinguish us. Recall those awful prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel who opposed Elijah and the Triune God. Their worship was about cutting themselves with knives, weeping, wailing, and believing their sacrifices made them acceptable to their god. (It didn't.) No, only Christ's sacrifice in our place, given to us via Word and sacrament makes us acceptable to God Almighty. Thus, true Christian worship always needs to center itself on that reality.

Of course, since human beings are a part of the worship equation, our response to Godly forgiveness elicits sacrifice on our part. And since that sacrifice needs to be honest and thankful (you cannot con God, He reads your heart), like David did, we confess our sins, we sing hymns of praise, we pray, and we even offer gifts to Him.—But all of this needs to stem from hearts first purified with His grace in order to be truly acceptable in His sight. Since the sacramental side of worship causes that purification (Christ is poured out upon you) God is honored by you through His Son, alone. As long as these things are observed in worship and it is done "decently and in good order" as St. Paul enjoins, such worship is truly Christian.

These truths seem to have been lost on our modern world. Today modern worship seems to be more man-centered than God-centered. And once people buy into that, if they've had a tough Saturday and St. Mattress calls on Sunday morning, it's very easy to stay in bed and rationalize it all away.

I was taught that Sunday worship is a blessing and a privilege. After all, what's more upbeat than having God Almighty forgive, uplift and instruct you? What's more important than having Him reload your spiritual weaponry each week so as to ward off the attacks of evil upon you? The fact of the matter is: God made humans for worship and we need it to have a complete life and a blessed week. That fact cannot be disputed. He even set aside a special day for us engage in such battery re-charging.

I doubt any normal human would shun receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, or the Pulitzer, or the Presidential medal of freedom because St. Mattress was calling. So why shun receiving the Medal of Eternal Life at the worship service?