

## **Heart and mind**

Philippians 4:1-9

October 12, 2014

Here's the thing ...

On the one hand, you have Orthodox worship. It's all about pageantry, about sounds and sights and smells and drama, celebrated in elaborate worship spaces filled with burning candles and sacred objects and images. Images everywhere. Art everywhere. It's all about beauty -- beautiful images, beautiful objects, beautiful music -- for God's benefit, to give God honor, but also for the benefit of the worshippers, to inspire a sense of wonder and awe. In the Orthodox tradition, this is how you worship God.

On the other hand, you have worship in the Reformed tradition, the branch of the Protestant reformation inaugurated by John Calvin. The Reformed tradition is represented in the various Reformed churches, in the Presbyterian Church, in the church of Scotland, and in our own United Church of Christ, and in the Bremische Evangelische Kirche of which our German guest, Heike Egidi, is a member.

Do you remember what she told us about the sanctuary of their chapel in Bremen? No images! Traditional reformed worship forbids the use of images, both in obedience to the commandment -- "Do not make for yourselves images of anything in heaven or on earth or in the water under the earth" -- but also to remove all distractions, to let the focus of worship be the word and the word alone, to let God's word speak for itself unfiltered by our elaborations. In the Reformed tradition, this is how you worship God.

So, here's the thing. Who's right? How do you worship God? It can't be that two worship styles so different from each other can both be meant for, and received by, the same God, can it?

And these differences are merely emblematic of the extraordinary variation and marked differences in the way different Christian traditions do worship: dignified vs. uninhibited, carefully scripted vs. spontaneous, ornate worship spaces vs. austere worship spaces, polyphonic music using many voices and many instruments vs. simple unaccompanied melodies sung in unison or no music at all. And that's to say nothing of the profound theological differences that give rise to these different worship forms and have kept the church divided against itself for centuries.

I ask again. Who's right? How do you worship God? How does God want to be worshipped? What does God want?

You know what God wants! Jesus told us: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” There’s the answer. Listen again! Love God with your heart, with your soul, with your mind.

There is one God. God is the same, but we are different. Our worship styles are different not because we happen to disagree about what it is God requires, but because we are different. All of our worship, all of our belief, all our thinking and feeling and doing about God is an approximation, all of it relative to who and how and where and when we are.

What God wants is our love. What God wants is us. We love God by giving God ourselves, as we are. We love God by giving God our best: the best of our hearts -- passion and affection and praise; the best of our souls -- awe and wonder and humility; and the best of our minds.

The best of our minds ...

All the Presbyterians I have known are thoughtful people, thinking people, precise, theologically attuned, concerned about getting it right. I regularly read the Christian Century magazine, a journal of news and opinion, reporting and scholarship, about the church and the business of being church. Its byline is “thinking critically, living faithfully.” It is edited by a Presbyterian minister, the senior pastor, now emeritus, of the Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago.

A favorite expression among Presbyterians is a quote from I Corinthians: “decently and in order.” Whatever you do, do it decently and in order. Keep things in order. Think right. Be right.

Presbyterians have a long and strong tradition of paying attention to mind, and, as is true of all our traditions, our strengths are also our weaknesses. I have always said that about our own church, the United Church of Christ. It is a strength that we are gathered by covenant, not by creed, that we commit to following Jesus together, but welcome and encourage a great diversity in ways of thinking about our faith. The weakness is that we can find it difficult sometimes to articulate just what we do believe in the United Church of Christ!

In the same way, the Presbyterian focus on mind can sometimes lead to neglect of soul and heart. Sometimes we come to a place where we just have to acknowledge the mystery, that we don’t know and we cannot know. And sometimes we come to a place where love has to take precedence, where we have to set aside order and even belief to extend mercy and kindness and love to a neighbor.

But it is also a great strength. Too many Christians and too many Christians churches have let their thinking become sloppy and muddled. We don't know what we believe and why, and so we react to the challenges and stresses and perplexities of this world by intuition or gut, not guided by faith, not listening to the Spirit. We need to learn to think clearly. We need to do Bible study. We need to be faithful students of the word so we can be faithful doers of the word.

Doesn't that make sense? Or are we supposed to just make it up as we go along? Or just do it the way we've always done it because it is the way we've always done it?

Why do you think it is so important to Presbyterians, to our church, and to many churches to have well-educated clergy? So we can be helped to love God with all our mind. So we will not be swayed or duped by dubious applications of word or faith.

Loving God with all our mind means learning to think clearly, paying close attention to what comes from our minds, but it also means paying close attention to what goes into our minds. Fill your minds with good things, Paul told his dear friends in Philippi.

We need to take care of our minds the same way we take care of our bodies. Or, at least, the way we want to take care of our bodies!

How would your body manage under a steady diet of junk food, if you filled it with nothing but potato chips and french fries and candy? How do you think your mind will manage under a steady diet of junk, if you fill it with nothing but reality shows and pop music and sports? None of this is bad for you, in and of itself, but if you fill your body or your mind with nothing but this.

And how would your body manage if you poisoned it, if you ingested antifreeze or heroin or rat poison? Your mind is the same. Some things -- some images, some thoughts, some fantasies, some preoccupations -- just don't belong there, unless you want to get sick, unless you want to die.

Fill your minds, Paul says, with things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, honorable.

Tell me some things that are true ...

Tell me some things that are noble ...

Tell me some things that are right/just ...

Tell me some things that are pure ...

Tell me some things that are lovely ...

Tell me some things that are honorable ...

Fill your mind with these things!

We love God by giving God our best, the best of heart and soul and mind. Some of us do better at some things than others. Orthodox Christians exceed at loving God with soul. Pentecostal Christians exceed at loving God with heart. Presbyterian Christians exceed at loving God with mind. But Jesus told us: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Not one of the above, but all!

That's why we have something important, something very important, to learn from each other. That's why we are doing this worship series, not to change ourselves, but to enlarge ourselves. We love God by offering ourselves as we are, but when we are enlarged by learning from each other's strengths, by making something of their strength our strength too, then we have more to offer!