



# awakened in the church

WHEN LINDA AND I BEGAN OUR SEARCH for a church home last year, our priority was clear. Because Jesus established the order of importance of God's commandments with love for God above love for man, that has always been ours as well.

One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

(Matthew 22:35-40)



We have long held that love for God (worship) in fact *energizes* our love for brothers and sisters in the faith (*koinonia*, i.e., fellowship). They work together, validating each other: Without communal worship, our fellowship is just socializing; without fellowship, our worship is just vacuous mysticism. But Jesus placed one before the other. Worship, a demonstration of our deep relationship with God, comes first.

So in the search for a church home our first consideration was the quality and authenticity of its worship. Everything else should follow, so long as that critical starting point was in place. In our minds, corporate worship would be the "drawing

**...for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.  
(Galatians 3:28b kjv)**

card," as it were, that would energize us to once again gather together with believers of like mind and purpose. So long as we could participate in authentic, God-honoring worship every week, we could live with any other perceived "deficiencies" in the church body.

But as we all know, our God has a deliciously ironic sense of humor.

So Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one ox for yourselves and prepare it first for you are many, and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it." Then they took the ox which was given them and they prepared it and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon saying, "O Baal, answer us." But there was no voice and no one answered. And they leaped about the altar which they made. It came about at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is occupied or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened." So they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them. When midday was past, they raved until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice; but there was no voice, no one answered, and no one paid attention.

(1 Kings 18:25-29)

## one body, one Spirit

My good wife of thirty-four years and I share a decided lack of enthusiasm for the

company of others. We do not find our sustenance in the congregation and noise of human beings, but in the quiet and solitude of the Creator's nature. On a temporal level, our needs are met not by social interaction, but by peaceful communion with our Maker. Thus, it only followed that corporate worship—public communion with, and adoration of, God—would be the first consideration in our search for a church home. We gave little thought to the more social side of Christ's body: learning and remembering names and faces, potluck dinners, group Bible studies, etc. These would follow, as necessary, but *worship* would be the critical yardstick with which one church body would be compared to another.

Little did we anticipate that God would turn this around on us. Once we had settled on a local church where we could worship, He began to do a work in us. Quite unexpectedly, God supplanted the church's corporate worship with its *people* as the font of our sustenance. In the inversion of God's humor, now it is the *people* of the church that draw us each Sunday to His house. During the week we think about these people—their joys, aspirations, and sorrows; we recall to mind what they have said; we pray for them; and we look forward to gathering together with them—especially around the study of the word—come Sunday morning.

### family

We have not changed our position that God sets worship of Him as man's highest priority. As stated in the oft-quoted Westminster Catechism, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever."

Indeed, this experience has borne that out. For without our steady, adoring

relationship with Him, God may not have bothered teaching us this lesson. At the same time, without that holy communion, we surely would have missed the point of it all together!

In Christ, believers enjoy a relationship with a *personal* God. As much as He is high and holy, God is also among us in the persons of the Son and the Spirit. He knows us because He dwells with us; He understands our trials and frustrations because He experienced them when He trudged this soil for Himself; He cares about us, loves us, and desires only our good.

With His intimate knowledge of our lives, the Lord determined that what Linda and I needed, right now, was not more and gloriously spectacular corporate worship, but to become acquainted with like-minded souls, to come inside from out in the cold, to become part of a family—the local representation of the universal Body of Christ. He wanted us to once again make contact with some of His other children—our brothers and sisters in the faith.

So, in His good humor, God brought us to precisely that which we had all along been trying to avoid. 

*From every stormy wind that blows,  
From every swelling tide of woes,  
There is a calm, a sure retreat:  
'Tis found beneath the mercy seat.*

*There is a place where Jesus sheds  
The oil of gladness on our heads;  
A place than all besides more sweet:  
It is the blood-bought mercy seat.*

*There is a scene where spirits blend,  
Where friend holds fellowship with friend;  
Though sundered far, by faith they meet  
Around one common mercy seat.*

*Ah! whither could we flee for aid,  
When tempted, desolate, dismayed;  
Or how the hosts of hell defeat,  
Had suffering saints no mercy seat?*

*There, there on eagle's wings we soar,  
And sin and sense molest no more;  
And heaven comes down our souls to greet,  
While glory crowns the mercy seat.*

*(Hugh Stowell)*