

St. David's Presbyterian Church

April 5, 2009

St. John's, NL

Palm Sunday

"O Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness"

Dr. J. Dent

Q: What is the correct Presbyterian procedure for changing a light bulb? A: The code-book states, "The motion as to changing the light bulb shall properly be brought under new business of the Committee of Management. When the main motion has been made and seconded, discussion of the motion shall proceed. Amendments to the motion, including specification of means of access and disposal of old light bulb may then be brought, as appropriate, and discussed. When the motion has been perfected, the moderator shall read the text of the motion. If there is insufficient light by which the moderator may read, then the motion shall fail and no action shall be taken. And if you didn't get the details of this, you can read it again in the upcoming newsletter.

What is the correct Pentecostal procedure for changing a light bulb? Seven people are required: One person changes the light bulb and six cast out the spirit of darkness.

What is the correct United Church procedure for changing a light bulb? We choose not to make a statement either in favor of or against the need for a light bulb. However, if in your own journey, you have found that a light bulb works for you, that is fine. You are invited to write a poem or compose a modern dance about your personal relationship to your light bulb and present it next month at our annual light bulb Sunday service, in which we will explore a number of light bulb traditions, including incandescent, fluorescent, three-way, long-lived, and tinted; all of which are equally valid paths to luminescence.

What is the correct Baptist procedure for changing a light bulb?
Change???

And you can switch some of these answers around amongst different denominations, and although we do have many differences between Christian denominations, we do all have one thing in common. We all find worship to be the highest priorities of what we do. We all worship.

Now I'm not saying we all worship in the same way. No. Some of us sing just the newer songs in a long set. Some of us sing just the hymns. Some of us read four Scriptures from the Lectionary. Some of us read one Scripture as we feel led. Some of us pray with written down prayers, some of us pray only extemporaneously. Yes, we all worship in different ways.

Some of us worship with our hands in the air, some with our heads bowed, some on their knees, some with dance, some with words, some with silence. We do worship differently, but all of us in the Christian denominations worship the same God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Worship is more than the songs we sing. It is more than the prayers we say. It is more than the Scriptures we read. Worship is more than the entertainment value of the service and more than how you feel about church. Worship is more than the preacher and the teaching.

Worship is a lifestyle. Worship is that to which you give yourself. What do you give yourself to? What stirs passion in you?

For some it is sports, they know every player, every stat, every game. They are fan-atics. For others, it is work. For some, it is movies, every actor is known, every producer, every set and production and venue. For others, it is food. For some, it is motorcycles, or clothes, or shopping, or gambling, or snowmobiles, or opera, or jazz or the newest computerized gizmo, or cars, or novels, or a TV programme, or a certain drink oryou can fill in the blank now.

What we give ourselves to is what we worship. That's why so much of what we do here week by week is about giving ourselves to the Lord. Pledging our lives anew to the Lord, and being serious about following Him no matter where we go in our lives. Giving ourselves to God is the essence of Christianity and the center of our worship. From this comes the good works, the right relationships, the justice and community that we seek.

And so when the people were waving their palm branches and throwing their outer garments onto the street before Jesus, this was simply a way of giving themselves and what they owned to the Lord. It was a common expression of giving approval and following the Victor who had come from the Battle, and although Jesus had not yet won the battle, the people were treating him

as someone who was victorious, that was the symbolic meaning of the colt or donkey. It was an animal symbolizing peace, not speed or battle, unlike the war horses of the day. And so we wave our palms in praise of the One who won so long ago, and continue to tell of his victory.

We also look up and remember the words of the hymn, *Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness*, which we will sing at the end of the service. But these words in turn come from Holy Scripture in the Psalms 29:2 or 96:9, or David's psalm in 1 Chronicles 16:29.

Let's look at this in some detail. The older word "O" at the beginning of the quote is an extra encouragement to the usual imperative of *Worship!* Why be commanded, urged, exhorted to worship? *Worship* fulfills who you are in the context of eternity. It is the activity that will fill our future, because our future is all about the Lord. We are encouraged to worship because we find our true identity in relationship to God. We are encouraged to worship because it goes right back to the roots of our humanity and the One who made us and loves us. We are encouraged to worship because we are needy, even if we don't want to acknowledge that fact all the time. In our need of God, we receive. As we worship, we find we have family forever, we have meaning, we have purpose, we have fulfillment.

It is "the Lord" who brings us together. It is the Lord who brings boundaries and beauty, perspective and peace. Our acts of worship only begin to scratch the surface of who God is. Every week I say something about creation in our opening prayers, and the greatness of God. We don't pause enough to think of this God knowing every one of the billions of people on this earth personally. This God knows every cell in our own bodies. He knows the heavenly bodies as well, every square centimeter of space, the vastness of which we can hardly imagine, let alone measure. Creation dims in comparison to the Creator, who we are only beginning to know, who will continue to amaze us and surprise throughout eternity.

And "in the beauty of holiness" refers to God's beauty and splendor, not ours. This is an encouragement to worship and be set apart to God, which is what "holy" means. So as we worship we find our way back to our roots, origins, and future. As we are set apart to God, by what God does for us, we then can enjoy all the benefits of relationship to God.

In fact the “beauty of holiness” is exactly what lies underneath the Scripture we have just put up at the front of the Sanctuary. It is the cross, the symbol of everything Jesus did for us, and how much it cost him. The beauty or splendor of what the Lord did for us in Jesus, is that he became one of us and gave himself up for our sins. He was our ransom, our purchase price.

God himself became one of us and gave up everything to be human, then gave up everything as a human, so that we could get close to God in relationship, closer than ever before. He is the vine, we are the branches, and we draw our life from Him. That's in part why the grape leaves are there. The fruit of the Holy Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control comes from the Lord.

And the lyre or harp to the left refers to our praise, our lifting our musical praise to the Lord as David did, and the burning bush refers to our encounter with the Living God, which is also the symbol of the Presbyterian Church, burning but not consumed, or, not yet burnt out. We have this wonderful reminder now at the front of the church, to not only cherish our roots and our connection to our previous Sanctuary on Queen's Road. We also have an important reminder to give ourselves to the Lord, every time we look up and see the Scripture here in front of us. We can choose, when we see this, to give our music to the Lord, to give our words to the Lord, to give our thoughts and emotions to the Lord, to give ourselves, our loved ones, our neighbours, our extended families, our friends, our community, our city, our province, our nation to the Lord. We can see in these few words set in oak, a great motivation for a deeply spiritual journey.

And as we do, let us give thanks for our all that we have.

Let us pray.