



WORSHIPPING IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH  
A Pastoral Letter for the Teulu Asaph, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2020  
from Bishop Gregory

**W**e have begun the long process of the return to worship. Our churches are opening again, but not to go back to what was before. In the first place, our return has strings attached, and there are precautions we are required to take. The virus is still there, hiding invisible among our communities; probably quite rare – I heard an estimate of 1 in 200,000 people the other day, but as it is impossible to say where, we still have to treat every encounter with the possibility that the virus may have managed to join our company.

More importantly, we have discovered in our long absence perhaps a new sense of why we come to worship. Someone said to me the other day: “I’m really missing Church”, and part of this will undoubtedly be the sense of “the beauty of holiness” that accompanies entering many of our church buildings. However, it is more than the building, it is the people. It is easier to pray when there are people praying around us. Communion with God – that fundamental sense of relationship and “heart speaking to heart” which is the religious experience – is complemented by communion with one another, baptised into one body as we are. I remember a friend of our family talking about the relationship with her young daughter some years ago: “It’s like watching my heart walking towards me”, she said. Would that we could feel that when we gather as sisters and brothers in a congregation – more importantly, it is what God feels when we approach him in prayer.

So as the 11 o’clock on a Sunday starts getting into its pace once again, and the wardens polish the silver, and the priest sets it upon the altar - in addition to abiding by all those distancing rules, what should guide us as we come back to Church?

First, worship is about giving God the worth due to him – it literally, in English, is “worth-ship”. As you slot the last piece of the jigsaw into place, there’s a sense of everything coming together, and that it what should be happening when we enter into the holy place – we gather around God, each metaphorically taking our place around the throne; we, as the tiny splinters of divine grace, drawn into the circle of the all consuming love of God. Read Isaiah Chapter 6 before coming into Church, and ask that your eyes may be opened to the eternal in our worship like the prophet.

Second, it is not therefore about what we get out of it, but what we put into it. When someone comes away from Church saying “Well, that did nothing for me”, they only have half a point. Worship should catch hold of our soul and carry it to the throne of grace, that’s why we should take care about what we do, but it isn’t there for personal entertainment: “Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God”, it is written in 1 Peter 5.6, “that in due time, he may lift you up.”

Third, for the stranger and the visitor, you are the physical face of God, and the quality of the welcome you give is the impression that they’ll take away of the value and meaning of your faith. If visiting Church is about sitting in the right place, staying on the right page, and behaving in the right way, the message is more like a bad school assembly than “my chains fell off and I was free, I rose, went forth and followed thee”.

Fourth, worship doesn’t end when we finish the liturgy, close the book and switch off the lights as we leave. It’s a way of living life. Just as a tuning fork is struck and vibrates in the resonance of a particular note, but really sings when it is grounded, so our worship needs to be grounded in the disciplined way in which we carry God’s love into the world.

Oh, I’m so looking forward to being back, and to seeing you all once again.  
May God bless our new adventures in holiness,