

WHAT CONGREGATIONALISM MEANS TO ME

1 Corinthians 12:4-6

"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work."

In "Mere Christianity", C.S. Lewis writes of the "house", the "hall" and "rooms". The "house" is Christianity, the "rooms" are various denominations, and the "hall" is the waiting area that precedes the choice of a denomination. He goes on to say the following:

"And above all you must be asking which door is the true one; not which pleases you best by its paint and paneling. In plain language, the question should never be: 'Do I like that kind of service?' but 'Are these doctrines true: is holiness here? Does my conscience move me towards this? Is my reluctance to knock at this door due to my pride, or my mere taste, or my personal dislike of this particular door-keeper?'"

The passage from 1st Corinthians & Lewis' story of the house are key markers for what worship at Plymouth means to me. Lewis unlocks deep insight when he asks "is holiness here?" I too often try to see holiness through an intellectual lens. While I believe thinking is a necessary element of faith, at its root, faith is a relationship with God that flows through the soul. The Plymouth community has invited me to consider times when over-emphasis on "thinking" faith obscures the leading of the Holy Spirit. Taken to extremes, it draws focus away from the truth at the center of our whole house - that Christ's death and resurrection alone restores us to the communion with God for which we were intended. In that communion, our deepest longing is met.

Plymouth has been my only exposure to the Congregational tradition. Worshipping here has opened me up to vulnerability, to questions of faith and doubt that live within each of our hearts, yet are all too rarely spoken. For example, even though I knew it wasn't true, I used to fear that God requires us to be a finished product before having anything to do with us, because how could it be otherwise for a holy and just God? In my time at Plymouth, I've wrestled with that fear & contemplated the truth that we're all broken and nonetheless God meets us through Christ to put us back together, if we let him.

Perhaps Brett said it best in his sermon last May - "Picture yourself as one of the disciples telling Jesus what you have been going through. Hear Jesus say, 'It's time for you to be still.' Picture yourself sitting on the beach listening. Listen to the water lapping on the shore and children playing in the distance. Smell the water and grass. Feel the ground beneath your feet and the wind blowing off the lake. Slow down and listen to Jesus telling you to slow down. Hear Jesus ask, 'What do you want to tell me? What are you afraid of? What's breaking your heart?'"

Through Plymouth, the vivid diversity of gifts, service, and working that exist within our community of faith have come into plain focus. I've been invited to engage more deeply with truths that only our hearts can hear: that God is holy, at once just and merciful, and that he perpetually loves us, seeks us, guides us, and compels us to do the same for others. I've begun to understand what it means to say "May God bless you with a distaste for superficial worship, so that you may live deep within your soul."

~Josh Myers