

**Isaiah 12:1-6** <sup>NIV</sup> In that day you will say: "I will praise you, O LORD. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me. <sup>2</sup> Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation." <sup>3</sup> With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. <sup>4</sup> In that day you will say: "Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted. <sup>5</sup> Sing to the LORD, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world. <sup>6</sup> Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you."

**Romans 12:1-2** <sup>NIV</sup> Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will.

## “Things That Will Endure: Worship”

The past three Wednesday evenings on the CBC radio show *Ideas* they've been broadcasting a series entitled "It's a Teen's World: Wired for Sex, Lies, and Power Trips". I managed to hear parts of it and I have to say that I am not looking forward to when Alice becomes a teen. Boys really haven't gotten any better since I was that age. They've only gotten worse. The power trips and lies that teenage boys put on girls to try to get sex, the sexual harassment that teenage girls have to put up with, a pop media that is openly pornographic and unchallenged...I'm scared. Alice is growing and we don't have long to wait because this mess starts in elementary school.

If I have to be, I'll be honest. When I was a teen, like most boys, I did my share of sexually harassing the girls, but we had our limits and for the most part we learned by the ninth grade that girls didn't appreciate it and that it was immature, something that losers did. Moreover, I'd of thought that the emphasis on sexual harassment education in the adult work place that has been so prevalent the last twenty/thirty years would have carried over to the schools. It apparently hasn't and the harassment has only intensified. It's like the marijuana that is out there today. It's been genetically modified to be insanely more potent than it was when I was in high school. In the same way sexual acting out among teens has become insanely more intense. Lynn Glazier, the producer of the *Ideas* program said, "Sexual harassment is the number one form of bullying among teens today and it is warping them." I would add sexual behaviour is something that is learned and if it is learned within the context of abuse, it will be abusive and unless that cycle is broken, the abuse will get worse. Friends, our young are being sexually abused by a pop culture media that we allow to go unchallenged and they are in turn sexually abusing one another.

Well, I don't want to rehash the program. I didn't hear enough of it to do that. You can listen to it on the *Ideas* website and I recommend that you do. Yet as a minister, the program sent me to thinking about what I would have to say about it from the pulpit. From this perspective, this radio program about sexual bullying among teenagers in three Toronto area schools, I believe, exposes the problem that our culture has with worshipping sex. Wrongly placed worship is brutally destructive. It always has been. In the ancient world worship of the gods of love, procreation, and agriculture and the feasting it involved tended to culminate in the sexual abuse of prepubescent boys and teenage girls. Though we don't go to temples anymore, the problem continues today and it's led to our young abusing each other and it's directly the result of us adults checking out on discerning what our young are worshipping...yes, worshipping...in their music, video games, and TV. If you are human, you worship and our children and youth are being targeted to worship the wrong things rightly and are being warped by it.

We've all heard of teen idols. We've all had them. The worship that children and teens give their idols is truly the most sincere worship you'll ever find. I remember back when I was 10 years old, I wanted to be Paul Stanley of the rock band KISS. I listened to their music every chance I got...every chance I got; and then I bought a few of their song books and taught myself to play guitar so that I could be...Paul Stanley. I worshipped him. I wanted to be him. Therefore, I did what it I thought it would take to be him...right down to standing in front of the mirror working on the Paul Stanley pucker. Our children and young people know what it is to worship. Why don't we, the adults, take that seriously because it's dead serious.

Well, if you will tolerate me playing the theologian, God created us human beings to be the part of his Creation that voices the worship that goes on deep in the heart of the Creation. Worship is the core activity of created reality and I wish science could discover it. Jesus, God the Son, the Creating Word of God binds the Creation together and worship recognizes that it's good to be created by God and that it's good to be alive. At the heart of the Creation lies the mystery of the incarnation of God the Son in whom and through whom everything was created and by whom everything has it's being. Worship is the voice, and if you will allow, the scientific voice that acknowledges Him. We read from the Revelation there a bit ago. The vision that John has there in chapters 4 and 5 is a behind the scenes peak deep into the heart of the Creation at what undergirds all of creation. The four living creatures represent all that has life and as it shows all that has life circles the throne of God ceaselessly worshipping God saying, "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come." They are saying that God is not part of the Creation. God is holy and holy means utterly separate and utterly good. John then says that the twenty-four elders (presbyters...Presbyterians;) the fullness of the human element of the Creation, give coherent voice to this worship. He said, "whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and

worship the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing, 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created'."

God created humans to give meaningful voice to Creation's worship of the Creator. We give glory, honour, and thanks. We give glory. What is glory? If you've ever seen a solar eclipse, the moment when the moon fully covers the sun leaving only a crown or corona, a circle of intensely bright light with an utterly dark center, that's where the idea of glory comes from. Worship of God is like that corona, the bright edge of fire that arises from Creation. If you've ever had those moments when deep inside yourself you've been moved to say, "God you've been faithful to *me!* God, you love *me!*" then you have voiced the glory, the glory of God's creation.

We give God honour. When you find glory and honour appearing together in the New Testament, honour takes on the meaning of worth. To give God honour is to realize that experiencing the steadfast love and faithfulness of God is the most valuable, the richest experience that one can have as a created being. Therefore, thankfulness follows. How could it not? Voicing glory, honour, and thankfulness, that's what God planted in our hearts as our created purpose.

So, worshipping is the core element of who we are as human beings. And damn it, our problem is that we are idolatrous. Sin, our fallenness, shows up in that we worship things other than God in the way we should naturally give glory and honour and thanksgiving to our Creator. You know it's not that God is narcissistic and has to be worshipped. It's that, this is the way things just are. Worship is the way we say thank you to the One who made us and loves us.

In Revelation 5:9 and 10 the twenty-four elders sing a new song worshipping Jesus saying that with his own blood he has purchased people, indeed us, from among every nation and people and made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God...and they will reign on earth. Friends, we are those who have been purchased by the blood of Jesus to be a kingdom of priests which reigns on earth. We've the responsibility and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to worship and serve God and to teach this world how to worship and serve God rightly so that people are not brutally abused because of wrongly placed worship.

You may be saying, "Wait a minute Randy. That's what fundamentalist militant religions do." Yes, but the power that we reign by is not the power of sword or mind control that arises from worshipping a false god of power. The power by which we reign is the power of the kingdom of God manifested in the one who gave his life and died and was raised for us because he loves us. The kingdom of God is about the self-giving, sacrificial love of God being unleashed in this fallen creation and the context where this most powerfully happens is in worship which culminates in working for justice and forgiveness through acts of love. Paul says in Romans that our worship culminates in offering ourselves to God in sacrificial obedience so that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, our will and desire. True worship is letting the Holy Spirit drive us to lay our lives down for others in acts of love that bring about justice and forgiveness. That's what it is to throw your crown down before God. Friends, go forth in worship and reign. Go forth and love...and having a talk with the young people in your life about what they worship would be a good place to start. Amen.