



Text of Presentation by members of the Liturgical Commission to the General Synod

York – 7 July 2007

The Liturgical Commission is committed to making connections between our lives and the worship we experience in our churches. The following stories may help make those connections; they show how worship transforms the lives of individuals and communities. And we hope to leave you with the question - is the worship that we experience transformative? Does it draw us towards God and others? And if not, why not?

1.

Meg was a good trumpeter who played in the school band. When the Vicar of St George's came to school to do an assembly he asked for musicians to play at the town summer picnic on the green. The local churches wanted to put on a short service at the picnic - a bridge between the churches and the local community.

When she got to the rehearsal, Meg found that there were young people from at least four local churches with differing musical backgrounds, as well as people like her who didn't go to church at all.

The service went well. The different Christians worked together and it was good.

Afterwards, the conductor asked whether she would come to church and help with the church band. Her experience of the service made her say 'yes.'

Meg helped with the band, and in time she was drawn into worship at St George's. She was confirmed: her faith grew.

That was four years ago. Meg is now off to university, and wondering whether she might have a vocation to the priesthood.

2.

Prayer Book Evensong at St John's had reached a critical point. Only three or four people gathered each week with the Vicar, and the PCC wondered whether the service ought to be discontinued.

One of the Churchwardens suggested trying something different for a while. The Vicar was asked to focus the preaching on the Psalms, and they built in an opportunity for discussion - relating the worship and the preaching to life at home and at work.

Within a few weeks, the congregation was asking for longer periods of silence for reflection and prayer.

Word soon got out that this was a time in the week when there was space to think.... space to pray.... space to be.... space to encounter God. And slowly, the congregation grew.

The reflections on the Psalms and the time for discussion, helped people make real connections between worship and daily life. And the stability of the familiar *BCP* form of service meant that it was a safe place in which to make those connections.

Prayer Book Evensong at St John's - and those who attended - were being transformed.

3.

Sarah hadn't been to church for several months, but this Sunday she knew she needed to go. Geoff, her husband, had finally received his test results and the prognosis was not good.

As she knelt down in the service it felt as if each word of every reading and every prayer had been written especially for her and for Geoff.

Sarah had come into church that morning feeling desperate, helpless and fearful for the future. But she left in quite a different state: convinced of God's love, totally forgiven for months of absence from God, and with a sense of hope for the future.

What had brought about the change? Maybe the familiarity of the prayers, the silence after the sermon, the love shown to those in need in the intercessions, the sense of belonging that came from receiving bread and wine with the other people in church.

Maybe knowing that she had met God in the worship: that as the Bible had been read and Communion shared, her life had been brought to a turning point.

And she was changed by the knowledge that the worshipping community would be there for her and for Geoff in the days ahead.

4.

St Mary's had always had a good Carol Service on Christmas Eve - it was well attended: a beautiful and awe-inspiring occasion.

But one of the children's leaders was concerned that there was nothing in the service for children.

So the church decided to try holding Crib Service earlier in the afternoon as well. They printed 100 service sheets and the Sunday School practised their nativity drama for weeks beforehand.

As dusk fell, people streamed towards the church. The church filled - and it wasn't long before they had run out of service sheets! There was a real buzz of excitement: the children had not gathered with their families on Christmas Eve in that parish before.

Everyone agreed that the drama presented by the children was fantastic, and there was no doubt that all the hard work had borne fruit: Christmas worship for those with young children had been transformed. The Crib Service soon became a parish tradition!

Jack had taken part in that first crib service, and the experience stayed with him. A couple of years later, as he went with his family to the service, he volunteered, 'I love Christmas Eve - you can really feel that Jesus is in the church with us.' He'd found a way into the worship, and a way of recognising God's presence among us.