



# into the Melting Pot

*the question is more important than the answer*

Sunday 08 April 2018

## **Why Do You Go To Church?**

*The following is copied from the Winter 2018 edition of 'Connexion', the magazine of the Methodist Church. Margo Atkinson wrote an article based on this for the March 2018 Wider Horizons.*

We go to church to worship God! We enjoy being with God. We want to celebrate all that Jesus offers, for we are a people of the resurrection – those who die and rise with Jesus and live every moment of every day certain that our risen Lord is in us and with us. We offer praise to God for who God is and all that God means to us. We offer thanks for the many wonderful ways in which God has blessed us; for the privilege of enjoying a relationship with the eternal God.

Worship is the central activity of the Church. Without worship there would be no Church. You can take away Bible studies and prayer meetings, you can lose a Sunday school or youth group, you can ignore social evenings and home groups, but if you have worship, you are still a church – a poor church but still a church.

In his report to the 2011 Conference, the Rev Dr Martyn Atkins, then General Secretary of the Methodist Church and Secretary of the Methodist Conference, said that having travelled around the country for a few years, he had picked up a prevailing view that Methodist worship “neither reaches the heights nor plumbs the depths”. Is Dr Atkins right? If he is, what has caused this and how might we change things?

I believe we get the worship we deserve. If we go to worship with a wrong frame of mind; without preparing ourselves (including praying for those who will lead worship); if we go with our minds made up as to what it is going to be like and what we will get out of it, questioning the length of sermon or choice of hymns, we then generate a self-fulfilling prophesy. You might find it helpful to think about other stumbling blocks to good experiences of worship, including these typically Methodist tripping hazards:

- 1 The free availability of the Preaching Plan listing who is taking the next service, along with announcing who is taking next week's act of worship, instead of simply stating when the next service will be and inviting people to attend. We need to move the focus away from the leader of worship to the God whom we worship.
- 2 Busy office holders going to church with lots to sort out and people they need to talk to – focussing on the busyness of responsibility rather than the One for whom we seek to be useful. The privilege of worshipping the God of love; the God of all creation; the God who was, and is and is to come, means that our primary focus should be on God.

Worship is when we come together to meet with God and any encounter with the living God will change us. People leaving worship should be different – changed – by the experience of meeting God. Perhaps imperceptibly at first, but over time we are changed.

*The Westminster Catechism* states that the chief purpose of humanity is to glorify God and enjoy God forever. Not to go to worship so that we can get something good from God. The principal focus of any worship is God. Graham Kendrick, quoting Lamar Boschman, puts it like this: “Worship is first and foremost for God's benefit, not ours, though it is marvellous to discover that in giving God pleasure, we ourselves enter into what can become our richest and most wholesome experience in life.”

Worship is the central activity of the Church and – perhaps – we could do better?

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