

*The Journey of Worship, Pt. 3*  
***The Call to Fall and Follow***  
*Luke 5: 1-11*

**First Presbyterian Church  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

**June 19 AD 2016  
Gerrit Scott Dawson**

---

I have an old friend who grew up going to a church more conservative than ours. They were pretty tight on the rules and pretty sure they had all their theology correct. We would talk sometimes about his experience of worship. He would say, “You know, I just don’t feel like I’ve been to church if I don’t leave feeling really guilty!” That was quite a testimony. I thought about how that kind of marketing would go. I can see the video now: “Looking for a church that makes you feel bad, really bad? Have we got a worship service for you!” This can’t be what we’re after in worship, just heaping up guilt. And yet. And yet, encountering the gospel authentically guarantees a certain amount of conviction. That’s not always pleasant. But it is exactly what transforms us.

When I first started preaching here a dozen years ago, not everyone thought it was for the better. One woman in particular regularly came out of church fairly agitated. There were lots of things she didn’t like. We could agree that we both liked church to start on time. But after that, it got pretty hostile. One morning she came through the greeting line and shook her finger at me. All she said was, “Too much! Too much! Too much!” I wasn’t really sure what she meant. Maybe it was too many fancy words, or too explicit contemporary examples. I was trying to adjust my voice to the personality of my new flock and it wasn’t always successful. But I liked to think that she was picking up on a particular reality of presenting Jesus accurately: he always confronts us with the truth about his Father and the truth about our lives. And quite often, Christ Jesus unmakes us before he remakes us. He confronts us before he comforts us. He slays us in our pride before he quickens us in his Spirit. And one essential purpose of worship is to bring us into this death-dealing, life-giving, ego melting, soul-saving encounter with Jesus. And quite often, I hear my own heart cry out, “Too much, too much, too much!”

So at the start of this message today, I’d like to commend you for being at worship. The truth is that it takes courage to engage authentically in worship when you know that your sin will be confronted even as grace for that sin will be offered. It’s a lot knowing you’ll have to deal with Christian realism about the world, the self, and God. I totally get why you might think on any given week, “What say we give church a pass today? I’m not feeling up to the encounter.” The fact that so

many of you engage week after week says everything about your passion to know Christ Jesus. It takes courage. It takes fortitude. And I am amazed, proud, moved that the more real and authentic we seem to get about Jesus and ourselves and our world, the more invigorated for worship you get. I brag about you to my colleagues, at least as much as they'll let me!

This week we're thinking about how worship gives a better pattern for our lives. Scripture reveals a pattern which God has in encountering us. I'd like to show you this pattern by looking at some Bible stories with you. Let's go first to Isaiah 6. The prophet begins his account of an encounter with the LORD by saying, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, seated on the throne, high and lifted up." His account starts with a particular time in history. What he's about to tell us happened in the real world. If I start a story by saying, "In the year that the Twin Towers fell," you know I mean 2001. I'm talking about a story that starts in a world we all know. Well, in that particular year in history, Isaiah got taken up in a visionary experience. He saw something not of this world. He saw the King of the universe on his throne. And mysterious creatures attended the heavenly king. The six-winged seraphim called out as they flew, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." In heaven's court, worship was going on. And it was powerful, noisy worship. For as the seraphim called out praise, the foundations of the heavenly throne room shook and the sanctuary was filled with smoke.

Isaiah saw and heard this scene of heavenly worship. And he thought he was going to be incinerated. He said, "Woe is me!" That's one way to translate it. He might just as well have said, "Yikes! Oh no! Dang!" In the presence of the awe-filled throne room of heaven, Isaiah suddenly felt very inadequate. Before the majestic holiness of God he felt unclean. He realized what came from his heart and his lips was nothing but dirt. "I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips." He looked upon a glory that was too much, too much, too much for his fragile, mortal eyes and his tainted, jaded heart.

Then it got worse. One of the seraphim flew towards him. He held in his angelic hand a burning coal taken by tongs from the fire that burned on the altar before the high king. Isaiah's unclean lips were about to be smacked with a sun hot coal of holiness. I expect the pain was excruciating. But Isaiah does not record the feeling of that hot coal on his lips. He is more astounded by the fact that he did not die. Instead, he got cleansed and made right. The seraph said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin is atoned for." Isaiah stood before the LORD on his throne, aware of the guilt within and without. But

the LORD sent to him forgiveness in the form of the coal. God convicted him, then forgave him.

And then, wonder of wonders, the Lord asked a question, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” The King on his throne had a mission and asked for an available servant. Isaiah did not hesitate. With his cleansed lips he called out before any other of the heavenly beings could snatch this assignment, “Here am, I send me!” I am ready; I will do whatever you say. And the Lord sent him. “Go. Speak a word to my people.”

We can think of this remarkable story in four distinct stages. 1) Revelation. God makes himself known to an ordinary person in an extraordinary way. Isaiah sees the King on his throne. 2) Conviction. Encountering the majesty and holiness of God convicts us of our frailty and our sinfulness. For a moment, it undoes us. 3) Forgiveness. Just when Isaiah thought he would be incinerated, the LORD sends the burning coal as a sign of his forgiveness. 4) Sending. Then God asks for an available servant. He sends the newly forgiven Isaiah on a mission that would echo with importance through the centuries. Revelation. Conviction. Forgiveness. Sending.

Let’s think now about how this pattern is repeated in our passage from Luke 5. It is an ordinary morning by the Sea of Galilee. Simon Peter and his mates are cleaning their nets on the shore after a night spent fishing with no catch. Jesus is there teaching the crowds. But then Jesus asks Peter to go back out on the water. “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” This was a crazy request to men who were exhausted, frustrated and thinking only of getting home. Besides, everyone knew you don’t catch fish with nets in deep water where the fish can swim below your nets. But they went out anyway. And suddenly there was a revelation of divine power. The nets began to fill with fish. So many fish that the nets began to break and as they hauled them in, the boats began to sink. This was a catch bigger than even a fisher could dream. All those fish flopping in the nets were like cash in the bank, clothes on their children and food on their tables. Overwhelming bounty revealed a gracious, mighty God.

But Peter suddenly didn’t care a bit. Not for this catch. Not for the boats. He fell on his knees before Jesus. Fish were flapping all around. All Peter could think of was that he was in big trouble. Just when the world would think Peter had made it as a great, wealthy fisher, he knew himself about to be incinerated by holiness. All those fish made him cry out, “Too much, too much, too much! Depart from me!” he pleaded with Jesus. “I am a sinful man, O Lord.” Conviction. The holy

power of Jesus had been revealed. Peter knew Jesus was Lord, and he was coming undone. He was not worthy.

Almost immediately, though, came forgiveness. In just a few short words, Jesus wiped away all Peter's sins and all his fears. "Do not be afraid." You now know who I am. I know who you are. You are indeed a sinner and not worthy. But I have the authority to forgive you. I know you utterly, Peter. And I'm telling you "Do not be afraid." I forgive you. And I have work for you to do. Sending. "From now on you will be fishing for men." So when they got back to shore, Peter left everything and followed after Jesus. In one concentrated hour the pattern unfolded. Revelation. They saw the power of Jesus. Conviction. He realized his sinful nature. Forgiveness. Jesus told him not to fear. Sending. Peter joined the mission of Jesus to save the world.

This pattern repeats throughout Scripture. And it provides a better pattern for human flourishing. We all follow patterns for doing well in life. A drama plays out and we think we know how it should go. The more usual pattern in our culture is this: Find your dream. Determine what you really want. Go for it. Overcome obstacles. Work hard. Believe. Persist. Then enjoy the fruit of having succeeded in your quest to have the life you want. Be fulfilled by getting what you sought. In short, 1) Want truly, 2) Work to achieve, 3) Enjoy. Of course, there's nothing wrong with having goals and accomplishing them. There's nothing wrong with healthy ambition, a good work ethic and great persistence. The problem, though, that as an ultimate pattern, this rhythm of Want, Work and Enjoy is not enough. It's not deep enough. The purpose of this pattern begins and ends with me. And it's not realistic. Want, work and enjoy does not account for the essential flaw within me. It assumes I can solve my problems, including my deep, usually hidden, conviction that something is not right inside me.

Worship takes us to a better pattern for human flourishing. To a recognition that there is a Creator who has made us for a purpose and to whom we are accountable. To a recognition that we have veered away from wanting his will and we've made a mess of it. To the proclamation that God sent his Son into the world to atone for our sins and get us back into living for the higher purpose of his mission to the world. We get a better pattern for building a life. More realistic. More difficult. But ultimately the pattern that leads to true significance.

Now we cannot manufacture an hour every week where God shows up in all his glory. We can't make him take us into the heavenly throne room or overfill our nets with fish. We can't get him to send angels with burning coals to our lips. But

we can re-enact this pattern and ask Christ to encounter us authentically in worship. So that's why the whole hour of a worship service is essential to forming us in the pattern God uses to transform us. We step out of ordinary life into a room set aside for his worship. We gather with the company of God's people and we lift up the truth about who God is. We sing the praise of the Creator of all things. We proclaim his holiness and his glory. That leads us to tell the truth about ourselves. We aren't ok on our own. We have sinned. We have fallen short. We confess. And then, remarkably, we hear the gospel news that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He stretches forth his hand over the sins he has exposed and says, "Do not be afraid." Then he sends us back into the world. He calls us to his mission. Part of that mission is the work of prayer we offer for one another and the world. Part of that is the way he ignites inside us a sense of how daily life is a mission field, at home, in school or in the office. Part of that is how he inspires his church to focus together on bringing his love to our community. In the worship hour, in the sermon, and in the Lord's Supper we enact this pattern. Revelation. Conviction. Forgiveness. Sending. Every worship service, every message, every communion is an encounter between the truth of God and the truth of our lives.

Now here's a key difference between these Bible stories and weekly worship. The Bible stories show encounter with God in a super-concentrated form: one moment changes you forever. Those certainly happen. But ordinarily, God works in us slowly and over a long period of time. It's not just one great worship service that changes us. It's a thousand ordinary services over the long haul through which the Spirit does his work. No one song may bring you into God's presence. But over time, our songs of adoration lay down a pattern inside us that God exists, that he is high and holy, that he is to be acknowledged and praised. No one prayer of confession may convict you until you think you will be incinerated. But confessing sin week after week lays down a pattern. What do I do with sin? I own it. I admit it to the Lord. I tell the truth. And no one sermon or declaration may give you the shivers of forgiveness. But over time, God works the gospel truth in us: You are more sinful than you have yet admitted. You are more loved, more forgiven than you can ever imagine. Just so, our sense of being caught up in God's massive salvation project in the world grows through engaging the pattern of worship week after week.

When we get this about the pattern of worship, the questions all change. The question is not "Did the music work for me today? Did the preacher interest me?" The question is, "Did I engage the pattern today? Did I encounter the God who calls, convicts, converts and sends me in Jesus Christ?" That's worship that transforms. Over time. Through encounter. Through laying down the lines of the

pattern along which God calls and redeems and sends his people. Too much, too much, too much? No, give me more!