



"Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Nathanael asked.
"Come and see," said Philip. (John 1:46)

As our 3 month trial of a Bluegrass Worship service in the evening was winding down last month a variety of opinions regarding whether or not it is in this congregation's best interest to continue providing this service began to surface. Naturally, those who have been coming to the Sunday evening service are enthusiastic and hopeful that we will keep this going. Meanwhile, also naturally, there are those who are opposed. Additionally, at the November church council meeting there was a faint hope that they might be given a little more time to adequately discern if we should continue this.

Recognizing that the month of December offered opportunities to promote this 3rd service as well as provide additional time for the membership to discern what God is up to with this, Howard and Ramona agreed to continue the trial period through the month of December. Additionally, because the 5:30pm Christmas Eve service for children and families was canceled due to an oversight (this year and for the next few years, Christmas Eve will be on a workday), the 5:30pm Christmas Eve option was open to make it a Bluegrass Christmas Service. Hopefully, this will promote the service forward, should the congregation council determine to continue it beyond the trial.

There are two questions before us, then, as we attempt to move forward together. So, I write this month to draw your attention to these questions, as well as encourage you to "come and see" this worship service for yourself.

Question 1: Is Living God willing to take a risk? Thus far, the congregation has been asked to assume virtually no risk at all. The musicians are being paid from that which is given. There has been no need to invest in musical instruments or sound equipment. The use of this equipment has been donated entirely by Howard & Ramona. No one from the congregation has been asked to hand out flyers, network with bluegrass fans or musicians, or in any way promote this worship service. So, for all intensive purposes, Living God has been given a gift. The gift of being able to try out a unique and different style of worship without having any start-up costs or risks associated with it. After having the benefit of this risk-free trial period, will we be willing to take the risks associated with moving it forward? Those risks are these: \$350/week to cover the costs of the musicians and the use of their equipment. And, the accommodation of evening members into the cultural milieu of the church ministry by adjusting meeting times and so forth to permit new members to get involved.

A discussion about the risk will no doubt require some reflection over the numbers. If you recall back to the month of August when we were talking about the possibility of trying this out for three months, there were some goals set. We wanted to see an average attendance of 35, and an average giving of \$350. At this writing, the average attendance is 50, and the average giving is \$510. However, the first two weeks benefited greatly from advertising and curiosity and slightly skew the stats. Eliminating those two weeks we have an average attendance of 40, and an average giving of \$438.

These numbers, coupled with the fact that our morning services have not noticed a drop off in either of the statistical areas suggest that there is little numerical risk to continuing this. However, recognizing that the week to week numbers for our Sweet Water Sabbath continue to decline rather than stabilize may actually suggest a higher risk. So, the question remains, is Living God willing to take a risk?

Question 2. The deeper and possibly more significant question is the discernment of God's will. Is this God's answer to Living God's cry for an evening worship service? Since I began here as the pastor there have been many that have asked me to start an evening worship service. When I originally heard these comments, I think there was an expectation that we would one-day start a "Contemporary" worship service making use of today's modern praise music. However, starting a praise or "contemporary" service would be very risky just to get started. Especially since we do not have anyone within the congregation whom already has the instruments, the sound system, or the willingness to rehearse and lead congregational music. So, without these gifts in our midst I was reluctant to take these suggestions seriously.

When Howard and Ramona came and offered all of their gifts it seemed to me like a "God Thing" had opened up. However, since beginning this 3rd service there have been a number of comments that point out to me that many do not see this as a "God Thing" the way I do, hence the need to discern this openly together. A couple of the comments I have heard, however, really should not be a part of this discernment.

"I don't like bluegrass." is a comment of mere personal opinion. It just so happens that there are many in our area who are quite fond of bluegrass. *"The people are coming only for the music. They don't come to worship God."* This comment, I find, is most often from someone who has not actually been to the service. So, come and see for yourself and I think you will find a spirit for worship that is not any different from that of those who come in the morning.

Similarly is the comment that the bluegrass attendees will eventually not be willing to commit to serving the church because they are only coming for the music. This is a rather judgmental comment, and it assumes that the validity of worship should be gauged by the intentions of the attendees. Let's not go down the road of judging one another's intentions. After all, the question before us is not to do with the intentions of people, but the intentions of God. Rule of thumb; when discerning the will of God keep the subject of the comment on what God is doing, not on what people are doing.

The church council will have to actually make this decision in January. So I write to encourage you to make good use of the evening service opportunities that remain and then communicate your comments to the members of church council. You may not like bluegrass music, or you may not like a bluegrass worship service, that's OK. I'm not asking you to like it. But if you are going to judge it, don't do so before actually "coming and seeing" for yourself.

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