

While this Sunday's Eucharist will be a quite a bit different than many are used to, I think that it is an experiment that places us in close proximity to the expression of the early Church. Our gathering in the Meeting Room at 9:00 AM this Sunday is borne of necessity; the refinished floor of the Church needs to cure, and the temperature in the Historic Church is nigh unbearable. The worship of the early Church was also borne of necessity. As a fringe movement in the early first century, there were no Churches in which to gather, nor were there cathedrals to awe participants into prayer. Rather, homes became the locus of early Christian worship. In fact, one of the great archaeological discoveries—Dura Europos—underscores the practice and piety of early Christians in the architecture of the building itself.

Of course, the Meeting Room is not a house, but it is an analog to that distant past of the Christian Church, and, perhaps, a model for the emerging future of our tradition as well. The dominance of the Christian tradition in the West for close to 1700 years possesses a rich and profound trove of music, art, theology, and liturgy. It also must be said that this history is paradoxically filled with violence, corruption, and the perversion of power. To travel throughout the world, one cannot escape the enduring sites, sounds, and structures that reflect the majesty of the tradition. To live in the 21st century, one cannot evade the cultural diminution of this tradition. Gone is the illusory center of power and control. In its place, the reduction to the margins of the tradition is what predominates.

For some, this devolution is depressing and a sign of the unmooring of our society altogether. However, remembering the early Church is helpful in this time. Indeed, the margins are filled with all sorts of vibrancy, possibility, and richness. There is flexibility and fecundity when we need not cling to power for power's sake. Rather we are freed to realize that the power comes from beyond us, and is not meant for us to perpetuate our own dreams and desires. The power is there for us to be used in the world for the life of the world in its many and varied manifestations. When the early Church met in the various homes that became the centers for worship and life together, they could not help but understand the Christ-like nature of their community. Power in weakness. Fullness in emptiness. Gain in loss. God in the Other. They were literally on the margins. Outside the city center. Beyond the hallways of political power. Separated from the sovereignty of the empire.

I often think that as we live into the 21st century Christianity will more and more resemble that early Church. Of course, the influence of 1700 years is impossible to shake off in a generation. And the structures and organizations of the Anglican Communion, the Roman Catholic Church, and many evangelical communities throughout the world make the Church an essential partner particularly in times of emergency, crisis, and need. Yet, thankfully, we do not live in a Theocracy. Nor should we. And as the culture drifts lazily or indifferently or vehemently away from the traditional Church, we are left to make meaning and share the gifts of grace with any and all who may come our way. We need not cry over spilled milk.

And the early Church is a reminder to us of the variety and richness that was very much a part of the genesis of the Christian tradition. Worshipping in the Meeting Room—as mundane as that may sound—may actually be a way into helping us think differently about our worship, our practice, and our place in society. The dictum throughout the tradition has been: *lex orandi, lex credendi*. That is, the way that you worship informs that which you believe or confess. It's the

Church's nod to the fact that we don't come up with ideas about God or humanity or community from whole cloth. We live into the ideas. And, often, those ideas emerge from the ways that we practice our faith, our worship if you will.

Thus, I am happy to worship in the Meeting Room this Sunday, because it will take us out of our comfort zones. It will force us to think and rethink what is essential to our prayer and our worship. It will remind us in the words of that saccharine children's song, "The Church is not a building, the Church is not a steeple, the Church is not a resting place, the Church is the PEOPLE." It will allow us to see things—God and life and others—from a different perspective. It will, literally, help us to take ourselves less seriously because we are practicing in room that doesn't take itself so seriously. Indeed, that last term, practicing, is an important reminder to us that worshipping in the Meeting Room underscores: we have not arrived, nor do we have all the answers; rather we are practicing, and all of our life is a living into who we are to be. The margins may not be so bad. . .