

But what does God think?

## **Part of being a pastor is dealing with impossible expectations for worship.**

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Some of my more evangelical Facebook friends regularly post calls to praise God. A few of them engage in those manipulative posts declaring, "If you love Jesus you will share this." Psalms of praise are often cited, and the need for us to worship God and to pray is highlighted.

Some of these same people regularly share posts that attack Muslims as vile and evil, or that imply people on food stamps are addicts and social leeches. And so when I read [yesterday's passage from Isaiah in the daily lectionary of the Presbyterian Church \(U.S.A.\)](#) *Book of Common Worship*, I couldn't help wanting to fling it at them.

When you come before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more; bringing offerings is futile ... I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity. Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates.

See, God has no use for your worship when you don't care about the oppressed and the poor and weak.

But just when I'm feeling a little smug, I remember what I do for a living. I'm a pastor, and many of the members at my church see me primarily in worship. They evaluate me primarily by how well I preach and lead worship. Ultimately, I have to attract people to our worship services for me to be successful as a pastor, and I keep a wary eye on the weekly worship attendance figures.

My uneasiness is only amplified by the fact that we've entered Advent. I can get away with some non-Christmasy sermons for the first two Sundays, including some

more somber sounding Advent hymns. But as the big day draws near, the carols will show up, along with familiar choir pieces and Bible verses that people love. It will culminate in some of the largest worship crowds of the year on Christmas Eve. It will be beautiful and moving with candles and carols and the story of Jesus' birth. Hopefully, God will be pleased.

I'm not suggesting that God will take any offense, but I do wonder about Isaiah and other prophets' critiques of worship that is divorced from social justice. I wonder about faith that doesn't somehow reshape and re-form us so that our concerns and priorities begin to mirror those of Jesus.

Modern American Christianity has some impossible expectations of worship. It is supposed to inspire, entertain, feed, comfort, uplift, and more. Church leaders spend a great deal of time trying to manage these expectations and provide worship that is both theologically appropriate but still sensitive to what people need and/or expect. But how often do we ask ourselves what God thinks of our worship? More to the point, how often do we ask ourselves what God thinks of us as worshipers?

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