

WE INTERRUPT THIS SERVICE

John 1:1-18

It was question and answer time at the worship workshop. Pastor and Author Thomas Long had been speaking on the theme of worship all morning to a group of people gathered in a church fellowship hall in a suburban neighborhood in Indiana. Dressed in sweatshirts and jeans, they had given up a Saturday of golf and gardening to sip coffee and listen politely as he rambled through discussions of Vatican II, Calvin's view of the Lord's Supper, the pros and cons of children's sermons, the development of the lectionary, the meanings of baptism, and other assorted topics about worship. Now, the lecturing done, he gulped down a little coffee and asked if there were any questions.

A hand shot into the air. It belonged to a fiftyish man with plump cheeks and rimless glasses who was, judging by the way his hand waved and bobbed, eager to speak. "There's one thing about our worship service here which really gripes me," he complained. "To me it's like fingernails being scraped across a blackboard."

"What's that?" he cautiously asked, fully expecting him to say something about gender inclusive language, newfangled hymns, politics in the pulpit, or sermons on tithing. But it was not one of these issues which caused his aggravation.

"The announcements," he declared. "I just hate it when the minister spoils the mood of worship with all those dull announcements." Heads bobbed in vigorous agreement all around the room.

Thomas Long said he knew what the man meant. You're soaring above the pews on Sunday, your wings catching the strong breeze of the Spirit carrying you upward from "Joy to the World" toward the choir's lofty "For Unto Us a Child is Born," and then, thud ... the Christian Education Committee will meet in the library on Thursday at 7:30 " Like Icarus striving for the sun, you find your wax wings suddenly melting, and you plummet back to the world of flesh, dust, and committee meetings.

The announcements do seem like a bag of peanuts at the opera, an ungainly moment of mundanity wedging its way into an hour of inspiration. What he tried to say to the questioner was that he understood how he felt and that, yes, the announcements were often rattled off without care or passion, and, yes, they did sometimes seem to be somewhat uninspiring, but that, after all, the details of the church's institutional life were important, and five minutes of them couldn't hurt, and so on.

After the meeting Rev. Long realized he blew it. He didn't give the right answer. What he should have said is that, properly understood, the announcements are one of those places where the rubber of the church's theology hits the road. Indeed, it just may be that by moving seamlessly from "Holy, Holy, Holy" to "the telephone crisis counseling ministry is in need of additional volunteers," by punctuating its soaring praise with the commas of the earthy details of its common life, the church is expressing in its worship one of its most basic convictions about the character of God:

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.... Christ has no hands but ours , may we seek to hear and serve Christ in our community and in the world.

God bless,

Pastor Barbara