

Learning to worship again

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Once I moved away from Chicago, I had a really difficult time eating pizza again. Every time I ordered it in another part of the country, it felt like a cheese and tomato pie masquerading as pizza. It was never as thick and fabulous as when I was in the windy city. The same thing happened with Tex-Mex when I lived in Austin. Then, I couldn't eat Cajun food after leaving South Louisiana. Restaurants seemed to think that "Cajun" meant burnt food. They didn't understand blackened.

It's interesting how a deep appreciation of a food can give me a critical feeling when I bevy up to the plate now. I think about the memory of that perfect pizza, the quintessential queso, or the consummate Cajun food, and everything else tastes a bit paltry in comparison. It's "not quite..."

Oddly, I worry that the same thing has happened with worship. It's been almost a month since I left my last call. It was an interim position and the church found a wonderful, permanent person. Now, I have the chance to duck into other churches and enjoy worship a bit.

Except it's kind of hard to worship. I used to get frustrated with the retired ministers who worshiped in the churches I served. They used to take me aside to mentor me, but often it just felt like criticism. And they pointed out the weirdest things, like the song didn't rhyme like it should or the person serving communion had the wrong sort of look on her face.

Now, I suppose I understand them a bit more, because it's difficult to turn away that critical eye.

I'm not saying that when I was leading worship, everything was perfect. Far from it. I left my mic in the office, forgot to change the battery, jumped ahead in the liturgy. Every week, I had a new and different chance to display my imperfections. I suppose that's how I got my critical eye in the first place. It was affixed on myself, in the

hope that I would become better. (It never worked.) I never served up perfection, but I do know what it's supposed to be like.

Usually I just show up, sit in a back pew and leave. One time, the pastor recognized me. He got really flustered in the handshake line and said, "You should have told me that you were coming!"

I laughed. *What did he think? That I was going to write a nasty blog post about him when I got home? That I was going to live-Tweet critiques of his sermon?*

But the sad thing is that I did have critiques. And I really need to let them go. I don't want to be one of those pastors who cannot worship because the song doesn't rhyme the way that I want it to.

Sometimes you just have to let go, let the Spirit move, and let someone else be in charge.