

SOME STEPS TO PERSONAL SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

Part 2

16 October 2005

The Rt Revd Michael Marshall

The six suggested steps on our journey are as follows:

1. Open to God **through** personal daily prayer and weekly corporate worship.
2. Open to God speaking to us **through** Scripture
3. Open to God encountering us **through** the Sacraments
4. Open to God and others **through** Service in the community
5. Open to God and to the needs of the church's ministry and mission **through** Stewardship
6. Open to God **through** Study of the Christian Faith

Our world is hungry for a meaning to life and is seeking for a life worth living. It is also hungry for genuinely changed people. Leo Tolstoy observed, 'Everybody thinks of changing humanity and nobody thinks of changing himself. Let us be among those who believe that the inner transformation of our lives is a goal worthy of our best shot!

Weekly Corporate Worship 'Why was I created,' asks the Scottish Catechism. 'I was created in order to worship God and to enjoy him for ever.' Equally incisive is the remark by the psychiatrist, in Peter Shaffer's famous play, *Equus* - later made into a movie: 'If you don't worship, you'll shrink, it's as brutal as that.' Worship and self-transcendence is what being truly human is all about. When we are totally self-absorbed, we 'shrink' and do not reach our full stature. Conversely when we transcend our own limitations and concerns, when we are 'lost in wonder, love and praise' - it is on those occasions that we find our true selves. So Descartes and indeed the whole spirit of the Enlightenment took a wrong turning when it declared: *Cogito, ergo sum* - 'I think therefore I am.' No, that may be all right as far as it goes, but the trouble is that it does not go far enough. A greater truth would exclaim - 'I worship, therefore I am,'

For in practice we are all compulsive worshippers in that, if we don't worship the One true living God, we will be driven compulsively to find other 'gods' to worship; money, cars, shopping, booze, sex - and all these to the point of addiction. Because, - and here is the harsh reality about worship - the difference between worshipping the one true and living God and all the other false gods is this: when we worship false gods they draw us into the bondage of addiction and into total dependence upon them, robbing us of our freedom to enjoy them. Have you ever seen a happy alcoholic enjoying drink?! However, conversely, when we worship

the one true living God, not only does the living God satisfy our thirst, our hunger and our needs, but also in so doing, sets us free by giving us back the freedom we lost through our addictions.

So worship is not restricted to what goes on in church, although it is especially focused in our worship of God in corporate worship. Worship is a whole way of life, freeing us and releasing us from the bondage of our selfish and self-centred concerns and so enabling us to enjoy to the full the beauty, truth and goodness of all around us.

But there is something further we need to know about worship - all worship in all its many forms: - namely, that we become what we worship. That of course is the reason why dogs sometimes begin to look a little like their masters, and conversely - and even more unnervingly - why sometimes masters begin to look a little like their dogs and pets! Adoration leads to transformation. So many people get the Christian faith back to front. They suppose that we need to start by being good and that worship is an optional extra in leading the good life. In fact of course the very opposite is the case. We need to start by exposing ourselves to the transcendent worship of God. Only to discover -and, hopefully unselfconsciously, - that we are being caught up into becoming ever more like the object of our worship. So even our faces, like the face of Moses, should look different after a church service or after a great performance of music. Yes, true Christian corporate worship inevitably issues in renewed discipleship, or to use the formula of Jesus: 'If a man love me, he will keep my commandments.' It follows, or should do, as day follows night.