



Things we've heard once too often.

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Have you ever heard a so-called “truth” once too often?

Here's one I heard recently: “being on mission is not just about going overseas as a missionary; it's also staying home to serve God wherever you are.” Who could argue? But suddenly I had heard this one too many times. Instead of a timely truth I now saw a donkey my generation loved to flog. I've taken my turn with the stick too. Because we thought our churches were over-emphasizing foreign mission to the detriment of local discipleship, we kept saying this, for decades.

But surely that donkey is now soundly deceased? Show me the churches, colleges and denominations that are still sending out so many global missionaries that they need to be assured it's also fine to stay home. Most Bible colleges whose founding purpose in the mid-20th century was to train missionaries have now shuttered their missions programs because no one is signing up. EMC missions now has exactly 12 people under EMC administration, from a high of 58 in 1980.

“Staying home is service to God too” was preached just when the affluence of consumerist North America was gripping our imaginations. People like me were relieved to hear we could serve the kingdom and keep the winter vacations, double car garage, Christian private school, and ski boat. It was a “truth” to the wrong people at the wrong time.

Here's another “truth” that needs retiring: “Worship is not just about singing on Sunday, it's about our heart posture in all of life.” In my generation, this went along with “being a Christian is not just about going to church,” another message that has surely over-delivered and now needs to be reversed. Being a Christian in fact does involve going to church.

In my lifetime the actual physical singing heard from people in the most pews faded to near silence. In many churches a chorus of hearty congregational singing has become irrelevant to what defines a good worship time. Just when public schools quit teaching all children how to sing, families no longer sang together much, church choirs closed because people weren't joining up, and Bible colleges shuttered their choir programs and no longer taught all students to sing, we kept telling ourselves, worship is not just about singing, it's about what happens in your “heart.”

The anthem for all this was “Heart of Worship”:

I'll bring You more than a song
For a song in itself
Is not what You have required
You search much deeper within
Through the ways things appear
You're looking into my heart

To people who were being taught that singing and making music was best left to professionals, being told that “a song in itself is not what you have required” was a nice relief. It was a “truth” to the wrong people at the wrong time.

Church will often be a zig zag affair, angling back again to correct the sins of our parents. It feels bold and prophetic to decisively heave the ship around and tack in the opposite direction. But an even better way is to proclaim the good news of **and**. Global missions **and** local outreach. Worship with the voice **and** the heart. Church on Sunday **and** living it out Monday. Verbal witness **and** social justice. The Old **and** New Testament. Obedience **and** grace. An intellect of steel **and** a heart on fire. Faithfulness **and** innovative thinking. Loving our neighbour **and** loving God.