



Spirit Inspired
Worship



Dispensing Surprises

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One afternoon this past week, I grabbed my big plastic cup and headed to the fridge for a water refill. I'm grateful for the convenience of an ice and water dispenser in the refrigerator door. The first step: ice. (If you do it in the reverse order, water splashes everywhere.) Normally, I expect the sharp sound of ice cubes crashing into my cup. Instead, I heard a plop. Looking down into my cup, I saw a small, plastic packet of sour cream! Curious, I checked the interior door and found several white sour cream packets sitting on the condiment shelf, perilously close to the ice dispenser hole. One – as far as I know, only one – fell in and was dispensed along with my ice.

It got some of us to thinking about what else we might dispense through that portal. Mustard or ketchup packets? Soy sauce, perhaps? Do you have a suggestion? Those spaces where the unexpected happens are ripe for imaginative thought. We're caught off guard and, in the moment, can dream of what could be...not simply what is.

Franciscan priest and noted author Richard Rohr wrote about such surprises in Just This: "Most of us just repeat the same routines every day, and we're upset if there are any interruptions to our patterns. Yet God is invariably and ironically found in the interruptions, the discontinuities, the exceptions, the surprises—and seldom in the patterns. God has to catch us literally 'off guard'! ...

"The great task of religion is to keep us fully awake, alert, and conscious. Then we will know whatever it is that we need to know. When we are present, we will know the Presence. It is that simple and that hard. Too much religion has encouraged us to be unconscious, but God respects us too much for that."

We might think that we can force this inspiration and plan it out. Or, if we dutifully repeat the ways in which we, as the church, have historically experienced the divine, then we can recreate it. We keep the same prayers or the same worship service. Our holiday services follow a familiar pattern. Over time, we might forget how much of our original holy experience resulted from happenstance, surprise, or the unexpected in that moment. As Rohr writes, "Staying awake comes not from willpower but from a wholehearted surrender to the moment as it is. If we can be present, we will experience what most of us mean by God, and we do not even need to call it God. It's largely a matter of letting go of resistance to what the moment offers or to quit clinging to a past moment. It is an acceptance of the full reality of what is right here and now. It will be the task of our whole lives."

Sometimes the unexpected is unwanted. I wanted ice; I got sour cream. So, I started over and got the ice I desired. The surprise, however, was what triggered my imagination. In our ministry settings, we can't always "go with the flow" of a roof leak or a power outage. We need to fix those problems eventually. But, in the midst of that disruption, as Rohr proposes, can we surrender to what the moment has to offer? Can we see God in the interruptions and allow ourselves to be caught off guard? May your life be filled with "interruptions, discontinuities, exceptions, and surprises" that reveal the very presence of God!