
Thinking in Parallels

By Sharon Yeung

● Taking a seat near gate 85 in terminal 2 of the Pearson International Airport, I ignored a friend's warning of stormy weather expected later that morning and thought only of being home with my family in approximately three hours. I kept myself occupied with a book about 'worshiping God and being church' and continued reading from where I had left off the other day. Half an hour before departure, I still had not heard any boarding calls for my flight to Winnipeg. I double-checked the information on my boarding pass before noticing the heavy rain that began to fall from the dark grey sky.

All flight departures were postponed. That's OK, I thought to myself, a thirty-minute delay isn't too bad. However, the weather did not improve within half an hour, and I watched the posted departure time creep forward in thirty-minute increments. Anticipation of meeting my family for lunch dissolved into disappointment.

Two hours later, the long overdue boarding call for my flight to Winnipeg was announced. I was merely another weary passenger, overjoyed to board the airplane at last. Home didn't seem so far after all! Not long after I settled in my window seat, heavy rain dampened my

remaining ray of hope. I thought about yesterday's bright sunshine. Why a storm right on the day I was traveling??

Soon, the pilot introduced himself over the intercom and informed us of the beautiful weather in Winnipeg, but he could not give us an estimated arrival time. While the final pieces of luggage were being loaded onto the airplane, the flight attendants performed their routine demonstration of proper seat-belt use and emergency procedures, including the use of oxygen masks in the case of cabin pressure changes. We sat expectantly with renewed hope as the aircraft pulled away from the gate towards the take-off runway. However, the runway was congested due to the back-up of delayed flights. We were about eighth in the line, and much to our dismay, the pilot turned off the engine after fifteen minutes of idling. Apparently, air traffic control was giving priority to arriving planes that needed to land. With the heavy rain and poor visibility, all the planes ready for take-off were advised to wait until the worst of the storm had passed. No one ventured to predict how long the wait would be.

At this point, my optimism reached its limit.

I was supposed to be home with my family by now! But here I was, no closer to being home, squished next to a very tall high school student, and famished as it was now long past lunch time. After what felt like an eternity, the crew brought out some lunch sandwiches. As I ate, I looked out at the relentlessly pouring rain and watched the raindrops trickle down the window like tears.

Dark clouds of uncertainty obscured the usual clarity of security in my life. I simultaneously felt angry at and grateful for the air traffic control staff: angry that they were currently preventing me from going home yet grateful that they could see the bigger picture of looming danger beyond my limited glimpse through the tiny airplane window. I had incredible difficulty being patient in these unexpected circumstances, but God was still real and near in the midst of my prayers of desperation. I suddenly realized how frequently God graciously handles the ignorantly impatient "passenger" in us along the ups and downs of life.

The same bleak outline of Pearson International stared back at me as I finished my sandwich. Time had passed, unaccompanied by any evidence of progress. We had managed to carry out all the rituals of an airplane ride without even taking off!

I took out the book I had been reading earlier and started thinking about worship. Actually, sitting in a motionless aircraft that has not left the runway despite completing all the standard procedures illustrates the futility of religious worship services that lack a clear focus

on God. All around the world, Sunday worship is performed in a rich variety of styles, but these refined rituals are done in vain if our hearts do not "take-off", so to speak. Worship is not merely about making a weekly appearance at the local church:

Worship is grasping a truth about God and then letting that truth strike you in the center of your being. It thrills you, comforts you. That's when the truth has moved from left to right brain - from mind to heart. On the spot, it will change the way you feel. And from that moment on it will change the way you act. The whole brain, the whole person is affected.¹

[Worship is] the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of the conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of the mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose - and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable.²

After all is said and done, do we, as worshipers, find ourselves staring at the same scenery, through eyes that have yet to be transformed by encountering the triune God?

1. "What It Takes to Worship Well: An interview with Tim Keller." *Leadership*, Spring 1994, 25(2): 19.
2. William Temple, *Readings in St. John's Gospel* (London: Macmillan, 1940), p.68; cited in Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), p. 80.

