

Sermon: Our Core Values – Worship is Our Priority
Scripture: Psalm 100
Date: January 22, 2012 Great Ends III
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Psalm 100

¹Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.

²Worship the LORD with gladness; come into his presence with singing.

³Know that the LORD is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

⁴Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.

⁵For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

Did you hear about the gentleman who stumbled and fell coming out the front door and front steps of the church? Being Presbyterian, with that whole pre-destination thing going on, he picked himself off the ground, brushed off the dust from his clothes, and said, “I’m glad that’s over.” See, everything is planned. We’re just finding out about it along the way.

We’re in a sermon series about our Presbyterian values. In your bulletin you find the statement about the Great Ends of the Church. Read that with me:

“The great ends of the church are ...”

The proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind

The shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God

The maintenance of divine worship

And we’ll cover the others on upcoming Sundays. The banners behind me are artistic expressions of these six Great Ends of the Church. Starting on your left, on the bottom, rising up and across, one after the other.

Today we have, “the maintenance of divine worship.” Worship is what we perhaps do best together. Week in and week out, we all come together for worship. And in our worship experience together a tone is set for how we handle the week to come.

Present day author and pastor John Piper wrote, “God is most glorified in us, when we are most satisfied in Him.” Worship is an expression of our satisfaction in God

and our love for God and our relationship with God. Worship is a participation in the glory of God.

Worship is informed and shaped by scripture.

Psalm 100:1 “Make a joyful noise before the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness.” Did you come to worship today with the right frame of mind, which is gladness? Psalm 122:1 “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.” Presbyterians historically tend to be so cognitive. It’s about the head. Love God with your mind. But love God with your heart as well. We don’t have to appear to be the frozen chosen. Let our emotions show.

Psalm 100 also says to come into God’s presence with singing. Singing. You can always find someone who sings better than you, but everyone with vocal cords can sing. God apparently loves to hear singing.

20th century English author C. S. Lewis said, “The most valuable thing the Psalms do for me is to express that same delight in God which made David dance.”
Worship is an expression of our delight in God.

The Psalm are high and low. High praise and glory. Gladness and singing. Or, low: “Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord” Psalm 130. The Psalms meet us where we are.

1 Chronicles 16:29 “Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come before him. Worship the LORD in holy splendor.” Worship itself is an offering. Showing up.

Hebrews 10:25 the writer advised his readers of “not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” See, you can be in the habit of neglecting to meet together. Skipping church. Or, you can be in the habit of meeting together, as all of you have done today, thank you.

1 Cor. 14:26 “When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.”
Worship is edifying, a feeding. It’s participatory. The first time I was in a worship service where they were speaking in tongues, it frightened me, and I left. It wasn’t edifying for me. It could have been, I guess, if someone would have interpreted it for me.

John 4:24 Jesus said, “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” Your spirit and God’s spirit connect in worship. You can’t necessarily see it or touch it, but it’s happening.

John Calvin, father of reformation churches such as our own, wrote in the *Institutes* (paraphrased) that the true church exists where the Word is rightly preached and the sacraments are rightly administered.¹ We go to a lot of lengths in these directions. We value an educated, trained clergy. There are standards and expectations for whoever gets into the pulpit.

Worship prepares us and equips us for life in a way no other spiritual practice can.

Worship involves many parts of us.

Worship involves the eyes of faith. The great evangelist Dwight L. Moody wrote, “We ought to see the face of God every morning before we see the face of man.” Seeking God in your spirit is the beginning of worship. Seeking the Holy One even before we get into the day’s routines. Worship involves the eyes of faith.

Worship necessarily involves the body. Body-language. Psalm 95:6 “O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!” Body language. Bowing. Kneeling. Standing. Sitting. Arms open and raised. Arms closed and down. Movement or being stationary. The body is involved in our worship. Robert Chapman wrote, “When I bow to God, God stoops to me.” Worship involves body-language.

Worship involves social awareness. Worship is a social experience. You’re never alone, even in personal devotions. The Holy Spirit and I believe angels attend your personal worship. A. W. Tozer wrote, “Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord **by being tuned**, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshippers meeting together, each one looking ... to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they

¹ Actual words are: “Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists.” – John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.1.9., p. 1023

could possibly be (otherwise).”² Worship is a tuning. Worship is a social experience, we’re never alone, even if we think we are.

Worship involves anticipation more than reaction. Sometimes it probably feels like you’re coming to church to recover from the rough week you just had. But usually it is more about preparing for what’s ahead. Like the gentleman who fell and picked himself up and said, “I’m glad that’s over.” Worship is more anticipation and preparation for what’s coming than it is reaction to the past.

The structure of worship here tends to be headlined by four or five things.

Gathering.

The Word of God read and proclaimed.

Sacraments, on communion or baptism Sundays.

Other Responses to the Word.

And then Sending. What’s included in these?

Worship begins as we gather. We meet and greet, coffee and donuts help, thank you deacons. There is gathering music. It’s not “mood music.” It’s gathering music, gathering the people of God. Lively. Spirited. Or calm, pastoral. We join in a call to worship, and we sing songs or hymns. The music is chosen to integrate with everything else, the scripture, the sermon, the baptism, whatever is going on. We voice our awareness we are in God’s Sacred Presence. This is how we begin.

Worship continues as we focus on God’s Word. Scripture is the center of worship. Scripture is read. Whether it is read by a pastor or liturgist is immaterial. I lift the Bible and say, “This is the Word of the Lord.” And you say, “*Thanks be to God.*” That’s just my way. You shouldn’t expect your next pastor will do the same. It’s just my style.

God’s Word is read, it is interpreted. A sermon, a children’s sermon, music, very often a choral anthem or other interpretive selection. Worship arts. Projection of images, that’s interpretation. Thank you, PowerPoint people. Liturgical dance, anyone? I was in a worship service once, not Presbyterian, where there was no scripture read. The sermon was a poem. Now it was an excellent poem, read well, but it wasn’t scripture or the proclamation of scripture. If there isn’t scripture, and a time to reflect on the meaning of God’s Word, what do you call that?

² Quotations obtained online August 12, 2009 at www.pietyhilledesign.com (The Quotable Christian)

Sometimes we have sacraments in worship. St. Augustine said a sacrament is a visible sign of an invisible grace. We have two sacraments, baptism and communion. Christ's grace is made visible, tangible, in water, bread, cup. Holy ground.

Worship continues with further Response to God's Word. Prayer and an offering. Sometimes we have a Minute for Mission. I know a church where they recite the Apostles' Creed every Sunday, and they recite the Nicene Creed on Communion Sundays. We have celebrations of birthdays and anniversaries.

Worship concludes with Sending. The Presbyterian Directory for Worship states, "In worship the faithful offer themselves to God and are equipped for God's service in the world." There is a sending forth of God's people with a blessing, a benediction, and the singing of a hymn or song. In the New Testament, it is said the apostles departed from the Upper Room, going out into the night, singing a hymn.³ A musical postlude is thoughtfully selected and prepared. Sometimes, like today, but not always, we offer prayer and anointing with oil for any who wish to come forward after benediction. It's simply an added blessing and prayer; totally optional.

Conclusion

Well, then, worship really isn't about us, and it isn't about how good the sermon was, is it? It's not about re-grouping after the week that was. It's more about how well we did directing glory to God, preparing for what's ahead.

How can we apply all this? I think of four things.

One. Make worship a priority. Worship, and worship often, not only publicly but privately. Making worship a priority means routinely putting other things aside. Shopping. TV. You know what gets in the way. God notices what you sacrifice to get here. Make worship a priority.

Two. Do an attitude check. When you walk into this sanctuary, you are *meeting God*. Are you worshipping from your heart in spirit and in truth, or is it just rote routine? Can it be said of you, "I was *glad* when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord." Do an attitude check.

³ Mt. 26:30

Three. Do a body-language check. How are you using your body language in worship? Are your eyes closed during prayer? They don't have to be, but if they are open, are your eyes open just to look around and see who else is looking around? *Awkward!* How are you using your eyes, your body, your hands? If you never raise your hands before God singing along with Joy Ensemble, try it if you like. It's in the Bible. "I lift my hands ..." No one will judge you. It's safe here.

Four. Invite someone to worship. I can't tell you how many people over the years have said to me they started going to their church because someone invited them. Who can you invite to church? A friend, a neighbor, a co-worker, someone in your family? Just say, "I want you to come to church with me. We'll have a good time there."

Four things. Make worship a priority. Do an attitude check. Do a body-language check. And invite someone to worship soon. May God bless you richly as you participate in the spiritual practice of worship.