

WORSHIP – ON PURPOSE

Pentecost 21 Year B

Jb. 42:1-6,10-17; Ps. 34:1-8,(19-22); Heb. 7:23-28; Mk. 10:46-52 Gladstone 24/10/2021

If I were to ask you: “When do you worship?” How would you respond? Most of us, I suppose, if you come here on a regular basis, would say something like: “Well, we worship on Sunday mornings at 9.00 am to around 10.30 am—referring, of course, to our usual Sunday morning worship service. Others, I suppose might answer the question quite differently, particularly if football has something to do with it.

When we think of the “how to” of our worship (that is, worship in the church as opposed to the kind of worship we might find at a football match or some other sporting or music event), we would usually think of things like our personal preferences of music or the type or style of worship we like (or put up with sometimes, maybe). Of course, we ought to learn to respect all forms and fashions of worship, regardless of how we might prefer to do it in this particular place.

It’s interesting that in the Bible, nowhere do we find a clear definition of what’s supposed to happen in worship—at least as to what time it should be or what style it should take. Certainly, as the early church grew, styles and procedures began to form, some of which can still be seen today. We don’t see it in the Bible, however, because worship cannot be contained in one certain style, nor can it be limited to an hour or so slot on Sunday mornings. Worship, like the One we worship—Jesus Christ—cannot be contained to any particular time and/or space.

In other words the “how to” worship is not as important as the “who to” worship and the “why to” worship.

Acts 2:46-47, speaking of the early church, tells us that,

Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

These early believers were purposely worshipping and it impacted both themselves and others. They first met and worshipped in the temple, until they were thrown out. And although this does not define the only place or time to worship, it certainly makes a point *for* our worship. The temple had two primary functions: first it was the place of sacrificing to God, and second, it was the place of offering worship to God. And the two of them went together. So, in one aspect, worship is to be “sacrificial” on the part of the worshipper—and while in the temple they were “praising God,” which points to the focus of our worship—God Himself.

Paul, in the letter he wrote to the Romans, certainly understood this when he wrote:

present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (Rom. 12:1)

When we look to the *substance* of worship (that is, what worship really is all about), it's not unusual to be drawn toward the Psalms. The Book of Psalms is in very many ways, the worship book of the church. As we look this morning to the psalm for today, Psalm 34, the psalmist shows in many instances the heart motive and life actions of worship. Psalm 34 begins with this call to worship, which I used as our Call to Worship this morning:

- ¹ *I will bless the Lord at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.*
- ² *My soul makes its boast in the Lord;
let the humble hear and be glad.*
- ³ *O magnify the Lord with me,
and let us exalt his name together.*

The psalmist, who we are told is King David, shows us several great aspects of worship—blessing God, praising God, boasting about God, humbling ourselves before God, exalting God, and magnifying God.

Note that the first two verses speak to personal or private worship, and verse 3 the “with me” and “together” is an invitation to corporate worship. They go hand in hand—the private worship of the individual should impact the corporate worship of the congregation and *vice versa*. And that call to worship is for God to be made greater in every aspect of our lives. And when He is: I will bless, praise, boast, and exalt the Lord as I humbly bow before Him.

For God to be magnified—for God to be made greater in our lives—we as the worshipper must become smaller as we come closer to God. And we do this on purpose. Worship that is conducted with a conscientious and focused attitude, or, as we could say, worship that is conducted “on purpose” or “with purpose”, magnifies God in the believer, and encourages those who are still seeking God—who are not quite there yet.

As you look at the subject of worship, both in the Old and New Testaments, no matter the “how to”, you will find two words that will help us in this process: “Preparation” and “Participation.” In the Old Testament, as well as in the New there were prescribed days of worship for both feasts and sacrifices. We see this in the Psalms of Ascent, that we have looked at from time to time. As the worshippers made their way to Jerusalem for an annual day or week of worship, whatever the particular festival may have been, they prepared their hearts to participate in the act of worship. And so must we.

Worship doesn't just happen. There can be a certain element of spontaneity but even more so, you and I need to prepare for worship—be it here or elsewhere. Certainly the minister needs to prepare, usually well in advance so that everything fits together with some sense of coherence. It's not called an “*order of service*” for no reason. There has to be some order about it.

The musicians also need to prepare, so that we all know what we're singing and have the appropriate music at hand and are well practiced. And this also goes for everyone else

who participates in the service in some way. But so do you—the worshippers—need to prepare. None of us should just be just waking up and showing up. All of us need to prepare ourselves for worship—not just so that we know what we’re doing and singing, but prepare spiritually—so that we might be open to where the Spirit leads us—not *just* in our worship but beyond it.

Psalms 122: says: *“I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord!”*

Psalms 100:1-5 says:

- ¹ Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.*
- ² Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.*
- ³ Know 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.*
- ⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise.
Give thanks to him, bless his name.*
- ⁵ For the Lord is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.*

Look at the words: “let us—make, serve, come, enter”. All of which suggests that each of us as worshippers must prepare ourselves for worship so that we take the focus off ourselves and place it upon God Himself. We must mentally, emotionally, spiritually and physically prepare ourselves to worship the One true God.

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Here are some of the ways, you might consider preparing for worship. You might prepare yourself for worship by:

- Praying before worship so that you will be ready to pray when you arrive.
- Read the Scriptures before worship so your heart will be soft when you worship.
- Sing or listen to worship music before so your voice will be ready to praise God.
- Come hungry ... willing ... expecting God to speak.

Now, I know that this is not always possible, particularly if you have to get children ready for church. I’m not that naïve—been there, done that. But you can still come hungry and willing, expecting God to speak.

And you can come prepared to participate. Worship is not a spectator event, but rather it’s to be a participatory event, in which you and I enter in and participate in the worship of God. And we are to do so with humility, giving all the honour to God. Throughout the scriptures we, as the worshipper, are instructed to humble ourselves before the Living God. Remember, worship, first and foremost, is not about us. It says so on our web site, so it must be true.

Worship is about finding “worth” in the One we are worshipping. So, when we participate in worship, we honour God—we place value and worth upon God. And we participate in a number of ways—not just according to the church roster schedule. And by participation, I’m not just talking about whether you’re playing the piano, or singing, or on the door welcoming people, or counting the offering or even helping distribute Holy Communion. These things are all important and necessary in the correct functioning and ordering of worship, but participation goes much deeper than that.

In whatever our role might be, or even if we don’t have any specific task to perform, we are to participate with:

- Gladness—to rejoice and be joyful
- Praise—to seek value or worth in God
- Joyfully Shout—this speaks to the lifting up of voices in adoration—there is a sense in which we are to be “a choir of worshippers”

We are to:

- Bless His name—to give honour and praise
- Boast in the Lord—to enthusiastically celebrate, and commend God, and we are to...
- Exalt His name—to raise up and lift his name high.

Worship, however it takes place, is to involve the body, mind and soul, so that God is magnified in all. We are to prepare and participate on or with purpose in the act of worship. And we must be prepared to let worship change us. Christian author Richard Foster wrote, “If worship does not change us, it has not been worship. To stand before the Holy One of eternity is to change. Worship begins in holy expectancy; it ends in holy obedience...”

Remember, as I said before: it’s not so much the “how to” worship, but the “who to” and the “why to” worship that not only impacts our lives, but the lives of others around us. We’re not here to put on a show. No matter what our role, we merely participate in worship and leave the rest up to God.

Finally, to quote Bill McCartney, Founder and CEO of Promise Keepers:

True worship is not just an emotional experience. It reaches to the very depths of our souls and touches every aspect of our being. While it can generate powerful feelings, it also can enlighten our minds, expanding our perspective and understanding of God. It can convict us of sin and lead us to repent; it can confirm a Scripture or specific word the Lord may have spoken to us and encourage us to obey; and it can change our hearts and inspire us to reach for new heights of holiness. Such is the power of the sincere praise and adoration of our heavenly Father.

As the psalmist says: *O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.*

And to him, be all glory, honour, majesty and power. Amen.