

Worship Comes from Within

Message for Sunday, January 14, 2018
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Psalm 100; John 4:20-24

Children's Message: [from Mark 7:1-23]

This is our bulletin. We print this every Sunday. It's so that people know what is happening in the worship service. They can look up the songs we're going to sing, and join in readings and prayers. But I wonder if it's really necessary. Most of it is the same every week. I could probably do this in my sleep. In fact, I see some people asleep right now. I'm going to throw this tennis ball and bop Jim on the head to wake him up. [But Jim was actually awake, and caught the ball and threw it back at me! This part was arranged ahead of time.☺]

Having this outline for worship becomes a problem when the outline becomes more important than the worship. For instance, I heard about one church where there was a great uproar because the pastor changed the time in the worship service when the choir sang. "We've never done it that way before!" people complained. They were more concerned about when the choir sang, than *what* the choir sang and *why* they sang. Tradition was more important than worship.

This is nothing new. The same thing happened with Jesus. Some people complained to Jesus because he and his followers didn't wash their hands in the traditional way before eating. Jesus told them that how they lived was much more important than how they ate. Following God's commands is more important than following human traditions.

So let us make it a priority in our worship, and in all of our lives, to follow God's way.

Sermon "Worship comes from within"

I heard a story about a woman who was too sick to go to church one Sunday. She asked her husband and children to go on without her. When they returned, she asked her husband, "What was Myrtle wearing today?" He said, "I have no idea. I didn't even look at her."

She then asked, "How are Victor and Betty getting along?" He said, "I have no idea. I wasn't really paying attention to them." She huffed and frowned,

and then asked, "Well, then what is Evelyn going to do about what her son did Friday night?" The husband was getting a little frustrated, and he answered, "I don't have the foggiest idea! How on earth should I know what she is going to do?" The woman was also frustrated and responded, "Honestly, honey, then why do you even go to church?"

A very good question! Why are we here? Certainly there are many things that people are looking for in a church: friendship, a place of caring and loving, vital prayer, inspiring music, good sermons, an opportunity to serve, outreach to others with practical help and with the good news of Jesus Christ, a place to grow in faith, and more.

All of these are important, very important. If any one of them is missing, all the rest suffer. Nevertheless, to me one thing stands out above all the others: worship. That's what I am going to focus on in my messages for the next few Sundays. Four weeks seems to be an awfully long time to spend on one topic. Then again, worship is so important that a *year* would seem to be an awfully short time to devote to it.

The first instance in the Bible of someone worshipping comes very early on. Adam and Eve's first children ended up in tragedy, with one of them murdering the other. Shortly after that they had another son, Seth.

Genesis 4:26, New Living Translation:

When Seth grew up, he had a son and named him Enosh. It was during his lifetime that people first began to worship the Lord.

From that point on, there are more than 1,500 verses which tell about people worshipping God! We're going to look at just a handful of those verses over the next few weeks. So let's get right into it.

The Psalms are a wonderful resource, full of songs and prayers of worship. They also contain songs and prayers of bitterness, anger, doubt, and fear. That shows us we don't need to put on a fake smile when we worship, and pretend that everything is fine. Even so, those Psalms are always part of a genuine and heartfelt offering to God, which is the essence of worship.

Psalm 100 is a great example of worship.

Psalm 100:1-5, New Living Translation:
 Shout with joy to the Lord, O earth!
 Worship the Lord with gladness.
 Come before him, singing with joy.
 Acknowledge that the Lord is God!
 He made us, and we are his.
 We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
 Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts
 with praise.
 Give thanks to him and bless his name.
 For the Lord is good.
 His unfailing love continues forever, and his
 faithfulness continues to each generation.

Let's look at that, verse by verse, to see what goes on in worship.

1) Rejoice ☺ get excited about God!

¹Shout with joy to the LORD, O earth!
²Worship the LORD with gladness.
 Come before him, singing with joy.

Sometimes it is right to be quiet and solemn before God, and sometimes it is right to be loud and energetic before God. This Psalm was written for the latter occasion! It bursts with enthusiasm, with joy, with excitement.

Of all the many different kinds of churches I have visited—and there have been many, from Greek Orthodox to Ukrainian Catholic to Four Square Fundamentalist to Quaker — I have always found the Pentecostal churches to be the most joyful. I can't put my finger right on it, whether it's the music, the people, or the freedom in the Holy Spirit—but I can just feel the joy when I'm there. I love going to a Pentecostal Church and letting myself soak in the sheer delight of worship.

Psalm 100 starts by telling us to shout with joy. When was the last time you shouted in church? We don't usually do it around United Churches, that's for sure! We'd be afraid someone might hear us, and think we're excited about God or something.

Why is it that if you yell at a hockey game, it's an exciting game; if you cry at a movie, it's a touching story; if you cheer at a rock concert, it's a thrilling performance — but if you get excited in church about God, it's emotionalism?

It's OK to be joyful and excited about God.

2) Humble ourselves, exalt the Lord

³Acknowledge that the LORD is God!
 He made us, and we are his.
 We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Thomas Aquinas, the greatest theologian of the Middle Ages, wrote this about why we worship:

We pay God honour and reverence, not for his sake (because he is of himself full of glory to which no creature can add anything), but for our own sake.

God is our Creator; we did not create ourselves. However, many people live as though they are the centre of their own little world.

There was once a man who brought his boss home for dinner. The boss was blustery, arrogant, and domineering. The little boy in the family stared at Dad's boss for most of the evening, but didn't say anything. Finally, the boss asked him, "Why do you keep looking at me like that?" The little boy said, "My daddy says you are a self-made man." The boss beamed and proudly admitted that indeed he was a self-made man. The little boy said, "Well, if you're a self-made man, why did you make yourself like that?"

The problem with "self-made people" is that they usually worship *their* creator, and not *The* Creator.

Being humble doesn't mean putting ourselves down. That's just false humility. In fact the ironic thing is, that when we humble ourselves and glorify God, we are lifted up by God's glory. There was a picture published in a news magazine several decades ago. A photographer was in the ghetto, the place of hopelessness in our affluent society. But there was a child wearing a t-shirt with the bold message, "God made me, and God doesn't make junk." Affirming that we belong to God brings hope, even in the darkest situation.

So let us humble ourselves, and exalt God.

3) Give thanks to God

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

What is there to be thankful for, to be excited about, anyway? Plenty!

- God loved me from before the time I was born.
- Even though I've done wrong things, God still loves me.
- God loves me so much that Jesus died on the cross for me, so that my sins can be forgiven.
- God promises to guide me, protect me, and provide for me.
- God wants to be my best friend, to live with me and in me.

If we *really* believed this, we would be so excited that we wouldn't be able to hold it inside. We would want everyone around us to know the good news. They could see it on our faces, they could hear it in our voices.

Why don't we do this, I wonder? I think it's because we take God for granted. And so our worship, instead of being a time of glory, becomes a worry about the time ("It's more than an hour!").

I invite you to think about all that God has done for you, and spend a minute in just being thankful.

4) Put your trust (i.e. your life) in God

⁵For the LORD is good.
His unfailing love continues forever, and his
faithfulness continues to each generation.

When we know God personally, when we know of his unfailing love for us despite our many failures, there is tremendous strength and comfort.

Why is it that two people can both go through the same situation of suffering, hardship and loss, yet one person shines while the other is bitter?

I think it's largely because of worship.

When I say "worship," I don't mean singing a song, or reading the Bible or even praying a prayer. That's part of worship, but that's not worship. It begins in the heart.

Jesus one day met a Samaritan woman who wanted to get into the old debate between the Jews and the Samaritans about which was the proper place to worship: Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim. Jesus told her that the *place* is irrelevant. It's the *attitude* that counts.

John 4:21-24, New Living Translation:

Jesus replied, "Believe me, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father here or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans know so little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews. But the time is coming and is already here when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for anyone who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth."

To experience God's presence in our lives is the most powerful, awesome thing that can ever happen. That presence and that power are what we need when we face tragedy and hardship. But I can't make it happen. You can't make it happen. That's because it's supernatural. It's something that God does. But God can come in only when the door has been opened from the inside.

Worship means opening the door to God. Worship means saying in our hearts, "I love you, Lord. I obey you, Lord. I trust you, Lord. I thank you, Lord. I exalt you, Lord. I enjoy you, Lord. I worship you, Lord."

It's a short Psalm, but it's full of good news! Let's remember:

- Rejoice—get excited about God!
- Humble ourselves, exalt the Lord
- Give thanks to God
- Put your trust (i.e. your life) in God

That's what worship is about. And it's not just something we do on Sunday morning. You can do those things all week long. Worship is a way of life.