

“Who Are the True Worshipers?”

John 4:20-24

7/11/10

Throughout the ages, whether we are in a tent or a majestic Temple, God desires our sacrifice unto Him, worshiping Him in His Truth and in the truth of who we are. God desires our worship because it is then that we open ourselves to Him, make ourselves vulnerable before Him, and allow ourselves to be intimate with Him.

I just came back from Annual Conference in Pittsburgh, PA. It was good to be a part of the larger church, connecting, discerning, and worshiping. There is something special about worshiping with 3500 people, all together in one room.

But you know, whether it's 3500 or 35, God is the same. Whether we have a choir of 100 people singing and a host of creative resources, or a simple, one-hymn kind of service, God is the same.

On our face, on our knees, standing, sitting, arms up, arms down, praise band, organ, choir, quartet, videos, or silence, God is the same in and through it all.

Praise be to God for that! And so we are here this morning to worship. We have a simpler, yet profound service today because we send off our youth to National Youth Conference and prepare other young persons for the best decision they will ever make in their lives: baptism.

Why *do* we come to worship? *What* is worship? Not just the things we do—the singing, praying, offering, reading, although those are part of it—but the *reason* we do what we do.

There are some who have given this serious thought, and have for a long, long time. *“Ascribe to the Lord, O mighty ones, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name; worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness.”* Words from King David, several thousand years ago.

“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth,” Jesus said.

Eugene Peterson says that “true worship doesn't *make* anything happen, [but] it is a losing of control.” That flies in the face of what many of us may be used to. We work hard at what we do. We practice, study, plan, and implement different facets of worship so that something happens when you show up here every Sunday morning.

Worship is not making something happen, but making the space for God to move.

Opening up room. We're preparing the way of the Lord, not forcing His way.

I like the image John Ortberg and Pam Howell use for the way we can sometimes get confused about worship: “Worshiping like the Scarecrow and Tin Man.”

Scarecrow worship is worshiping without a brain.

In scarecrow worship we can get too caught up in the emotions and feelings of the moment, that being our only criteria for how “good” worship is. Little attention is given to worshiping with the mind. It can become shallow, with little depth or rootedness. We may develop a “zeal for God”, as Romans 10:2 says, “but not according to knowledge.”
Worshiping without a brain.

On the other hand, there is tin man worship.

Tin man worship is worshipping without a heart.

It is all about cognitive correctness. We recite all the proper creeds, have tons of exegetical information, espouse all the correct theological treatises. Basically over-think everything to the point that we no longer fall on our face with awe and wonder before our awesome God. Worshipping without a heart.

Jesus said we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

God loves us and He simply wants us to love Him back. And it involves our whole being, all of who you are, simply gathering together to be in God's presence.

Early worship of God began with persons recognizing their place with God and their need to express their love for Him. Noah stepped off the ark after the flood and built an altar, offering sacrifices to the Lord, praising Him for saving them. Moses was given instructions by God to erect a tent, the Tabernacle, for the people to worship God while they wandered in the desert. Eventually the beautiful Temple was built by King Solomon in Jerusalem.

All this was designed for the purpose of offering up the best the people had to give in order to glorify God.

Worship has always been about giving—to God.

The Israelites gave their first fruits to God. David says, in Psalm 29, *“Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name; worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness.”*

“The true worshipers will worship God in spirit and truth.”

Throughout the ages, whether we are in a tent or a majestic Temple:

God desires that we worship Him in the truth of who He is and in the truth of who we are.

We sacrifice ourselves unto God, offering all that we are unto Him. Worship is surrendering unto God, recognizing who God is and who I am in relation to Him. It is then that we open ourselves to Him, make ourselves vulnerable before Him, and allow ourselves to be intimate with Him.

For some, that can sound like a daunting or humiliating task, a bad thing to do. Wendy Kaminer, an avowed agnostic, expresses her discomfort with religious beliefs in her book, *“The Trials of Being Agnostic: A Conversation With Skeptic Wendy Kaminer”*.

She says, *“Apart from the comfort I might find in religious belief, when I think about the question, ‘Does God exist?’ I put it in the category of things I can’t worry about. Questions I can’t know the answer to. My feeling is that, even if God does exist, it is really not my job to worry about him. If God exists, he’s going to exist whether or not I believe in him. He’ll be fine without me.”*

Kaminer says, *“Something that greatly bothers me about public religiosity is the mandate to worship. I don’t have a lot of respect for the view of God as some authority figure who wants you to come and kneel before him every week. There’s this sense that you are to go to your church or your synagogue or your mosque or wherever it is that you go and, in some way, abase yourself before the Lord. That seems to me to be such a demeaning way of seeing God—such an expression of human vanity! When human beings imagine God, they imagine a king. They imagine a flawed human being who needs to be worshiped.”*

Let the world know that the God we worship today is not an authority figure who only wants us to abase, or degrade, ourselves before Him. We do not worship someone

we do not know, but our Creator, who loves us and has given us life, everlasting life in His only Son, Jesus.

From the beginning of time, with Adam and Eve, God's first creations, God desired that we would live in an intimate relationship with Him. And as we worship Him together, we are expressing to God that we desire the same. We worship God in Truth—no pretenses, nothing to hide, no pressures to “do it right”, nothing to control.

Romans 8:2 says, *“Because through Christ Jesus the law of the spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”*

Verse 21 says, *“That the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.”*

We are set free. That is why we are here today—not because of any great music, or some cute drama, or because the church is so pretty. We're here because God has set us free, has given us life, and in our joy we fall on our knees and thank God, as all His people cry, “Glory!” It is so important for us to come together, all God's people gathered as one body, joining together in the mighty chorus singing praises to God.

It's not about the drum set, or an organ, or raising your hands, or sitting in silence. I don't think you will find a song list or a hymnal anywhere in the Bible. Those are all good things, but true worship goes beyond all that and involves letting go of myself and opening up to God, giving God my attention and all the glory.

What must you surrender to God in order to make a place for Him to truly enter in? Paul says in Romans 12:1, *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.”*

Yes, it is pleasing to God, which is the only thing that matters. The reality of God—His presence, His power, His grace—becomes clear as we worship. The form is not important. The function is: to open ourselves completely to God who loves us deeply. It is for God's glory. That is true worship. Those are the true worshipers.

“Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name; worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness.” Amen.

NYC Blessing

Baptism candidates