

"Passionate Worship"

Portions contributed by [Kenneth Sauer](#).

Psalm 84:1-12

Luke 18:9-14

After a full weeks' vacation, I am prepared to wrap up our sermon series, where we are discussing 40-Days of Community, based on the book by Rick Warren of the same name.

So far, we have learned the importance of Evangelism, and how we need to be out in the world, even in its stressful state, (actually, more so since it is in this stressful state), to share with anyone that we can the love that Christ has for all.

We learned the importance of Fellowship, and how we are not meant to do this work on our own, but among family and friends. Now, that leads us to Discipleship...and more importantly, discipleship small groups.

We need those small groups that will hold us accountable in our journey with Christ, that can help us grow and to stay on track with God's plan for us, and to go back to and remain in His Word. And, we are to encourage them as well.

Two weeks ago, before my vacation, we talked about Ministry. We discussed how it is vital for us to share our gifts with the church and with our community...to be that leader that can step out of our comfort zones, out of our own shadows, and help and encourage others to do the same, so we can fully and completely, show the world what it means to be the full body of Christ in our church. To show the people who visit us, that they can feel welcomed and that they do belong here, and how much we care about and love them.

That brings us up to today. Today we are discussing the 5th element of the 40-Day's of Community, and that is Worship. If I had to rank the 5 elements of this series, it would be rather difficult, as all five are extremely important when it comes to community; however, I believe that worship would be at the top of the list.

Because, you see, we humans are not created to be godless. And if we don't know God...the true God, we will make our own deities. It's a sign of our finitude, and a subconscious awareness that we need direction, purpose, and a relationship with something...Someone bigger than ourselves.

God created us for relationship. God created us to be in relationship with Him and with one another. Tragically, we broke that relationship, but we haven't lost our genetic makeup which needs...or, must have, that relationship with the Almighty.

The story of the Bible is the story of God and humankind trying to rebuild our broken relationship. We see this story played out from the Old Testament to the New Testament. We see this story played out in all of human history. We see this story played out in our daily lives.

It's the story of a lost people and a loving God. It's the story of a very weak people, and a very strong God. It's a story of a God who seeks us out, and a people who, often, don't want to be found or don't know that we have already been found.

But, oh, when we realize we have been found...and that God is the One Who sought us...and sought us with such love, in fact, that He was willing to come and die in order to have relationship with us...oh, how wonderful it can be!!!

In our Gospel Lesson from Luke that you heard just a few moments earlier, Jesus tells a parable about two men who go up to the temple to pray.

One of the men, he is very confident in his own righteousness, and looks down on everyone else. He is one of the religious leaders of Jesus' day—a Pharisee.

The other man...well, he is a hated tax collector.

The Pharisee probably thinks he is doing God a great big favor by going to the temple at all. And he prays to God about himself...about how good he himself is...**“God I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even this tax collector,”** the Pharisee prays.

It's a sad prayer is it not? What is even sadder is that this man, a Pharisee, does not even understand that he is not in relationship with God. God is missing from his life, and he is not even aware of it! You see, Jesus would have said, this man, a Pharisee, was blind!

And that is because...well...that is what he was...blind to his need for God...blind to his own sinfulness...blind to the love and grace of God.

But the other man who went up to pray, the tax collector, he saw very well. If the Pharisee was blind, the tax collector had 20-20 vision!!!

We are told that he was so aware of his need for God, so aware of his sinfulness, so aware of his lost state that he **“...stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God have mercy on me, a sinner.’”**

Jesus goes on to tell us that the second man, the tax collector, rather than the self-righteous Pharisee, went home saved or in right relationship with God that day! Do not the lyrics of one of...if not the most beloved Christian hymn, contain the words: “I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see”?

How many folks have passionately worshipped God through the hymn “Amazing Grace”? How many others, think of it as one of their favorite songs, but have no ability to relate to its meaning?

The tax collector worshipped God. The Pharisee worshipped himself. Who do we worship?

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, had an interesting take on the problem of sin and evil in the world. It's called the "happy fault" tradition.

To the questions, "Didn't God foresee that Adam and Eve would abuse their liberty in the Garden of Eden? And didn't God know the horrible consequences which this would have? And why did God allow this disobedience to happen?"

Wesley answers that God permitted disobedience, because the divine remedy for it would far exceed in blessedness the baneful consequences of the Fall.

For God's response to Adam's Fall was to open the possibility for humanity to attain "more holiness and happiness on earth than it would have been possible for [us] to attain if Adam [and Eve] had not fallen. For if Adam had not fallen Christ had not died."

So there would have been no room for that amazing display of the Son of God's love to us...There could have been no such thing as faith in the Son of God, **"as loving us and giving himself for us."**

"There could have been no faith in the Spirit of God, as renewing the image of God in our hearts...For if Adam had not fallen Christ had not died...Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!"

When an American diplomat visited the Amazon, he spoke (through a translator) with a Brazilian Indian, who had recently given his life to Christ.

"What do you most like to do?" the American asked...expecting an answer such as "hunting," "canoeing" or "fishing."

The Indian answered: “Being occupied with God.”

The American said, “Ask him again. Something may be lost in translation.”

But the Indian gave the same answer. What an excellent definition of true Christian worship!!!...being occupied with God!!!

Pascal once wrote that inside each person is a “God-Shaped Void” which cannot be filled with anything less than a relationship with God through Jesus Christ! And when we come together to worship, we are filling that “God-shaped void!”

We don’t attend worship to squeeze God into our lives. Instead we come seeking to meld our lives into God’s! And there can be nothing more exciting than that!

Both the Brazilian Indian and the writer of Psalm 84 are passionate about worshipping God...**“Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God then dwell in the tents of the wicked.”**... **“blessed is the man who trusts in you”**...the psalmist bursts forth, hardly able to contain himself!!!

Have you ever felt yourself, so excited about worshipping God, that you were hardly able to contain yourself? Have you ever been that passionate about worshipping Jesus Christ?

God uses worship to transform lives, heal wounded souls, renew hope, shape decisions, provoke change, inspire compassion and bind people to one another! God through Jesus Christ actively seeks relationship with us through worship. Just think what we are missing when we decide not to come and worship God!!!

From the earliest accounts of faith, people gathered to pray, sing, listen for God’s Word, and share in the common meal.

The word Synagogue means “to bring together,” and the Greek word for church, ekklesia, means “called out of the world.” Worship was the reason given repeatedly for why God liberated the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt.

“Let my people go, so that they may worship me,” God declares in Exodus Chapter 8.

Worship is what defines us as God’s people. It is only when we are born again or born of God through faith in the saving work of Christ that we are able to truly worship God!!! Did not Jesus say: **“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth”?** **John 4:24**

Let me repeat that, as that is our memory verse for this week, **“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth”?** **John 4:24**

When we worship, we practice the highest command Jesus has taught us: **“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”**

Worship bends our hearts toward God as it stretches our hands outward toward others.

From our Psalm for this morning, the writer describes an eagerness for relationship with God in worship: **“My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.”**

We live in a world filled with people whose hearts and even flesh are crying out for the living God. Think of the number of folks who take their own lives each year...and even more so this year because of what is going on...many of them young people...their hearts and flesh were crying out for the living God!

Think of the people who drown themselves with alcohol or numb themselves with drugs...their hearts and flesh cry out! Think of the persons who try and find happiness in bigger houses and more expensive cars and clothes...their hearts and flesh cry out!

These people live next door to us. They are our neighbors, our co-workers, our class-mates! They may not even be conscious of their need for relationship with God.

Who is going to invite them to experience what it means to have God “**dwell**” in their lives? Where are they going to learn that people are most blessed when people are “**ever praising**” God?

The psalmist writes to God: “**Blessed are those whose strength is in you.**”

Where do you find your strength? “**Blessed are those...who have set their hearts on pilgrimage.**”

You see, Christianity is a journey...not a destination. We begin the journey when we make a commitment to Christ...the pilgrimage continues through our lives as we continually come together and find strength upon strength through worshipping God in community!!!

So, are our hearts on a pilgrimage with God? Is our worship passionate, alive, authentic, fresh and engaging? Are we honest before God and one another? Do we come to worship God with an openness to God’s presence, truth and will for our lives?

Many times we might unconsciously enter worship in the evaluative posture of someone preparing to write a movie critique. We rate the sermon, the time for children, the prayers, and the music according to some internal scale.

But worship is about a community of faith gathering, to interact one with another and with God...we aren’t to be like a bunch of strangers at a movie! We are all a part of the worship experience!!!

When you sang this morning did you make a joyful noise unto the Lord or did you lip-synch? It is not about how you sound, but the joy in your song.

When it was time to pray, did you really...I mean really pray...or did you just drift off? When the Scripture was being read, did you listen carefully to every word or read along?

Our experience of worship begins with the attitude, the spiritual eagerness, and passion we bring with us. Our United Methodist Hymnal includes John Wesley's "Directions for Singing" from 1761.

He encouraged the early Methodists to "sing lustily and with good courage. Be aware of singing as if you are half dead or half asleep, but lift your voice in strength...Above all," Wesley writes, "sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing Him more than yourself, or any other creature."

In how we sing and pray, in how we greet others, in how we approach the sacraments...passionate worship begins with our love for God, our desire to open ourselves to God's grace, and our eagerness for relationship to God.

What kind of attitude and eagerness do we bring with us to worship?

The responsibility for the quality of spiritual life in our congregation does not reside only with the pastor or the choir director. What each one of us brings to worship shapes the experience for everyone. Passionate Worship begins with each one of us!!!

One way to deepen the experience of worship is for each one of us to actively prepare our hearts and minds and souls before walking through these doors. Nothing reinforces corporate worship more than a relationship with God through Christ which is lived out each and every day!!!

And nothing keeps that relationship fresh and exciting more than a vibrant personal devotional life.

Jesus said, **“I am the vine; you are the branches.”**

Worship keeps us connected to our source of life and enables us to grow in Christ! And just as in the early church, God adds to our number day by day because we as worshipers naturally invite those with whom we have other things in common!

Everyone has a role in fostering Passionate Worship!!! How am I doing in my role, how are you doing in your role?

An hour of Passionate Worship changes all the other hours of the week. When we regularly and in community practice Passionate Worship God gives us more and more of an interpretive lens through which we are able to view the world with His eyes!

What better way is there to make disciples of Jesus Christ and transform the world?

The Bible is our story. We, like so many who have lived before us, are groping for relationship with God. And there is no better place on earth to find and foster that relationship than in the midst of God’s own people as they passionately worship Him!

God is calling every one of us into Passionate Worship. And in giving in to that call we will—one day—find ourselves walking into the Promised Land!

For in the Bible, the Book of Revelation ends where Genesis begins...in a garden where humankind is in perfect relationship with our Creator and with one another.

I’m looking forward to that day, how about all of you? **Amen!!!**

Benediction;

We are in some trying times right now...but it can be changed when we Christians come together; When we evangelize together, when we fellowship together, when we do discipleship and minister together...when we Worship together, and bring the full Body of Christ to this lost and broken world.

But in order for that to happen, we must be that key word that you keep hearing, and that is “Together”! We must be together here and be the community that reaches out...reaches out to the community that surrounds us and beyond.

You know, they say that Jesus will return on a cloud. Could it be possible that that cloud is really the dust...the dust that is stirred up by the Christians here on earth fulfilling that call to be the full Body of Christ?

Let us start that cloud right here in Newaygo, Michigan. **Amen!!!**