

My Spiritual Worship

Romans 12:1-2, John 4:23-26

What a joy it is to gather in this place to worship the Lord. We come from many different places and situations in our lives, but it is a special privilege each week to find this time of worship. You know how I like to quote the one Psalm that says: I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." Of course worship takes on a lot of forms and worship can be expressed in many ways.

I heard about a woman who was visiting a fairly formal and staid service and she kept punctuating the pastor's sermon with the words: "Praise the Lord". Everytime the pastor made a point that stirred her heart, she would shout it out: "Praise the Lord." Finally one of the ushers came over to the woman and sternly stated: "Excuse me, miss, but we don't praise the Lord in this church.

Well, I hope if the spirit moves you to say an "amen" or "praise the Lord", our ushers will only encourage you. But we all have different ideas and opinions about worship and how we should express ourselves. You remember how you used to go into restaurants and they would ask you: "Smoking or non-smoking". Well, I'm reminded of one of the church cartoons I saw where the usher asks a couple entering the sanctuary: "Clapping or Non-Clapping". I suppose if we were to take a survey on how you would like to have a worship service, some might say throw out all the liturgy and any order of service so that we can be free to move with the Spirit. There may be others who want to see more liturgy and more structure and find great meaning in formally written prayers and planned worship. Some like more traditional forms of worship while others are more comfortable with a very informal style.

The truth of the matter is that our participation in a more formal or very casual service is not really the issue for both can both be acts of worship. Because the issue is not the form or the structure, but it's all about the spirit we bring to our worship. The apostle Paul's plea to the Roman Christians was just that - spiritual worship. "I urge you brothers and sisters, to present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual worship." Your spiritual act of worship...you can tell from these words that Paul isn't just talking about a church worship service, but rather how we live our lives. That we would live in the spirit of worship. It comes down to the attitude of our hearts. Isn't that what Jesus was getting at when he spoke with the Samaritan woman: "God is Spirit, and those who worship him must

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worship in spirit and truth.” Spiritual worship, The great theologian Karl Barth wrote: “Christian worship is the most momentous, the most urgent the most glorious action that can take place in human life.”

One of the praise and worship songs we sing is the Heart of Worship...that express the desire to come back to the heart of worship, a sincere, authentic expression of worship before God. I wonder: How would you rate your heart of worship? What if we were able to measure our own personal spirit of worship. How about this morning as you came to this place. Do you feel like you came to worship the Lord in Spirit and in truth?’ We come here on a Sunday often for many different reasons and feelings. We often find ourselves carrying all the weight of the past week and we can have a hard time centering ourselves and being as spiritually attentive as we need to be. Yes, we need to bring those burdens and concerns to this place, but what a difference it can make when we also prepare ourselves for worship together. I guess what we are saying is that if worship is so important are there some things we can do that will allow us to more meaningfully worship the Lord, to be person who can worship in spirit and in truth.

Well, when it comes to our weekly worship in church, I suppose one of our biggest struggles is just preparing ourselves to be in a spirit of worship. So that as we come into this place we are ready to encounter the living Christ. I’m not naïve to think that getting ready for worship especially on a Sunday morning can sometimes be a challenge and if you have children to get ready you find yourself rushing to get to church on time. I certainly understand that, I remember Joanna having to do that with 3 little children and I certainly wasn’t a whole lot of help since I was getting ready for the service. But I suppose most of us could improve on our preparation. That it does make a difference the attitude and our approach we bring into worship. I grew up in the country and there were lots of times when I couldn’t have friends over so I was pretty good at making up games for myself. I used to go out into a field with an old baseball bat and a pile of stones and play a whole game of baseball tossing the stones into the air and making up players and teams as I knocked those stones for doubles, and triples and mighty homeruns. And I thought about the story of a little boy playing baseball by himself in the back yard. His parents were watching him as he would toss the ball into the air and attempt to it with the bat. As he did so he proclaimed to no one in particular, "I’m the greatest hitter in the world!" Unfortunately, he missed the ball and, since he was the umpire too,

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regretfully announced, "Strike one." Undaunted the little fellow picked up the ball, threw it back into the air and said, "I'm the greatest baseball hitter ever!" With even greater intensity he swung the bat but all he caught was air for his efforts. "Strike two," he said. The boy paused a moment, examined the bat and ball carefully, and then for a third time threw the ball into the air. "I'm the greatest hitter in the history of baseball," he said. This time he swung for all he was worth, but just like the other two attempts, he missed. "Strike three," he mumbled. Then the boy sat for a moment considering what had just happened. After a minute or so, he turned to his parents and much to their surprise said, "Wow, I just struck out the greatest hitter in the world! I must be the greatest pitcher of all time." Well, your perspective and your attitude can make all the difference in what you do. And it is certainly true when we come to worship.

As I was thinking about this I was wondering...what about taking some time before the service begins, spending some time in prayer, quieting your heart before the Lord, sort of mentally and spiritually opening yourself to receive what God has for you this day. To be in a spirit of prayer for the service, for the musicians, for the pastors and all who will be leading worship. I know the Praise team has been working on this to create an attitude of readiness as we gather. I know we love to socialize when we get together, but what if we focused more on preparing our hearts when the music begins...or when the organ or piano prelude starts at any service. At the 8:30 service we even include these words: "During these moments before worship we encourage you to greet those around you and to extend a warm and friendly welcome to those who me you may not know. When the music begins, please join in silent prayer and preparation to worship God." Obviously we don't want to get too legalistic about this, but what a difference such an approach can make to allow us to put ourselves in a worshipping posture so that we can be attentive to whatever word God has for us this day. I want this to be my spiritual act of worship. That my heart-felt prayer will be: "Lord, renew my mind and spirit. Help me to know what your will is, your good, pleasing and perfect will. I am so pulled by the world, to be conformed to the world, but help me, Lord to be transformed in this time of worship."

And it's not just the sermon time that I try to stay attentive, but all the parts of the service are part of my worship. A few weeks ago we declared how important music is to our worship. And we are blessed

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with a wonderful music ministry, but it is a ministry that involves all of us whether we play an instrument or not, or whether you have great voice or can't carry a tune. We make a joyful noise when we sing with all our hearts, and really mean it. You remember Wesley's directions for singing that you find in the front of the hymnal. I'll remind you of two of them: "Sing lustily and with good courage. Beware of singing as if you were half-dead or half-asleep, but lift up your voice with strength. Be no more afraid of your voice now, nor more ashamed of its being heard, than when you sang the songs of Satan.. And above all sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing God more than yourself, or any other creature." Those words were written in the 1700's, but they still apply to the spirit in which we worship today.

I guess what I'm saying is that the mental and spiritual attitude we bring into worship makes a big difference in what we receive from it. If we approach our worship not expecting anything to happen, then probably nothing will. But what if we participate with an expectant faith, really believing that God wants to speak to us. Really wanting to receive something from the Lord, that puts us into a whole position...a position of spiritual worship.

I hope you see our times of worship as a life-shaping and life-transforming experience. Worship doesn't have to put us to sleep. I saw another church cartoon with the ushers greeting visitors and this time asking: "Snoring or non-snoring." I hope you are in the non-snoring crowd, ready and open to receive from the Lord.

Of course, worship more than the hour or two we spend on at a church worship service. We know that we can worship God whenever and wherever. That we want to carry this attitude of spiritual worship into our everyday life. I think that's why Paul describes it as presenting your whole self. Like a sacrifice on the altar. To present our bodies as a living sacrifice, which is our spiritual worship. His word of admonition to the Romans in verse 11 of that same 12th chapter: "Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. The NIV translates is: "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord." I want to bring that attitude into a service of worship, but how important to live in that spirit in my everyday world.

Worship is about giving ourselves in devotion and heartfelt gratitude to the Lord. It is the expression of David when the ark of the covenant was brought to Jerusalem after the defeat of the Philistines. Listen to his worship before the Lord: "Great is the Lord and most worthy of

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praise. Splendor and majesty are before him. Strength and joy in his dwelling place. Ascribe to the Lord, o families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength, ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name...worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness.”

As I read these words, I think, now that’s worship, spiritual worship. Ready to give God all we are with gratitude and heart-felt praise and ready to live our lives in such a way that we would convey our work, our play, our family time, our conversations, all that we do in a attitude of spiritual worship before the God who created us and loves us.