

## The Worshiping Community

December 4, 2022 Sermon by Stephen Portner

### Psalm 100

*A psalm. For giving grateful praise.*

<sup>1</sup> *Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.*

<sup>2</sup> *Worship the LORD with gladness;  
come before him with joyful songs.*

<sup>3</sup> *Know that the LORD is God.*

*It is he who made us, and we are his;  
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.*

<sup>4</sup> *Enter his gates with thanksgiving  
and his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and praise his name.*

<sup>5</sup> *For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;  
his faithfulness continues through all generations.*

A worshiping community shares in the praise and thanksgiving of our Almighty and Ever-Gracious God. That's why I love Psalm 100 as it is written in the great prayer book section in our Bibles.

*Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.* – The whole earth is beckoned to shout God's praise.

*Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.* – We are not worshiping God out of a sense of duty, but because we are filled with joy that he is our God.

*Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.* – This is God's covenant with us: He is our God and we are his people, now and forever.

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.* – This verse speaks of the joy of entering into God's kingdom. And although we know that the church here on earth is imperfect, it is nevertheless the only door to God's kingdom through Christ alone that we are given.

*For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.* – What a wonderful word of assurance, not only for us but for those who preceded us in the faith and all those who will follow afterward. God's faithfulness endures forever. Amen.

I loved my grandfather. I only knew one grandfather and grandmother, because my maternal grandparents had passed away before I was born. It was only later in life I learned that some people had more than one set of grandparents, and I thought how wonderful that would have been. My grandfather and grandmother lived next door to my parents most of my early childhood. I was especially close to my grandfather. He owned Portner Lumber Company at that time and we would often ride in his Ford pick-up truck (it had to be a Ford) to check out what forests he owned to see how many board feet could be timbered from them. Often my Dad would drag some tree-tops out into the clearing where I would cut it up into firewood and throw it onto the pick-up truck. My grandfather and I would have many interesting conversations as we were doing that.

In fact, my grandfather did a lot of things with my Mom and Dad and with us kids. One thing I did notice, though, was that he didn't come to church with us. So one day while we were loading up the truck with firewood, I asked him about it. He told me that he does his own worship, usually in the woods by himself sitting on a tree stump. At the time that was good enough for me. It seemed even a little quaint. Sitting in God's good creation contemplating God and the things of God. I get a warm feeling thinking about it even now. Later in life, however, I realized that my grandfather was missing out on being part of a worshiping community, a community of faith, that you just can't get by worshiping in isolation.

Have you ever thought about why you are a part of a church? Have you ever wondered why some parts of the worship service may be more meaningful to you than other parts of the worship service?

There are some false narratives regarding why people come to a worship service.

**False narrative: Worship is a personal matter meant to inspire the individual.**

While we can (and should) worship privately, and we can (and should) experience inspiration, that is not the primary reason for corporate worship; it is not about individual inspiration but rather the transformation of the person within, by and for the community. People say, "I go to church to get inspired." I think this can be a noble, even godly, desire. We are hungering for a deeper life with God, and our time in worship can be a way to make us feel connected. Looking forward to that is no sin. But I am concerned when this personal, individual need eclipses the need to take part in something bigger than the individual, which may or may not feel good to us. While church need not be boring, it is also not designed merely to give us good feelings. Too often the church tries to compete with secular forms of entertainment, and too often this leads to pale imitations (e.g., top ten lists from the pulpit). While inspiration is a byproduct of worship, it is not the central aim of worship.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, James Bryan. *The Good and Beautiful Community* (The Good and Beautiful Series) (p. 171). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

**True narrative: Worship is a communal activity meant to instruct a people.** Church is the only place where we hear the true story of who God is, who we are and what our lives are all about.

**False narrative: Worship is an obligation we owe to God.** “In truth, God does not need our worship. God is perfectly fine without it, but we need to worship. When we worship we are aligned with the truth, and our souls function well when immersed in the truth.”<sup>2</sup>

**True narrative: Worship is an invitation given by God.** “Far from an obligation, worship is an invitation from a gracious God. Worship is our response to what God has done and is doing. Worship is an invitation from a gracious God who bids us to come and enjoy his beauty and goodness. ... Worship, including the practices that make it up, is a powerful means of forming God’s people through its unique language and practices. Worship is a gift, a blessing and something we long for once we have truly experienced it.”<sup>3</sup>

Why be a part of a worship service? For me, it helps me to better connect to God. Worship is not just a place to hear about God and the things of God. Worship is *experiencing* God. God has provided me with everything. God has provided me with my talents, the food that I eat, the life where I can live with shelter over my head, clothes on my back, and a lovely wife by my side. Why would I not want to take the time to give thanks to God and praise Him for all he has done in my life? Yes, I enjoy being around people I know – that is a part of being in a community of faith – but for me, it is not even necessary that I know the people I am worshiping with. It is most important to know that together we form the body of Christ, as Paul writes about in his first letter to the Corinthians. We are all different, many parts of the one body of Christ, each gift a manifestation of the Holy Spirit for the common good (1 Cor. 12). It is an added blessing, however, to be able to see the people you know and the people who know you all gathered together in one place to worship in the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

There may be acts of worship – that is, parts of the worship service that are meaningful to you.

**Greeting** – Acknowledging one another’s presence. It’s nice to come to a place where you can feel welcome, cared for and loved.

**Confessions and forgiveness.** We all come to realize that we live less than perfect lives, and that we need to be able to confess we have done wrong to our Creator and to our fellow human beings. In our confession we know we are helpless to make amends on our own. We need God to save us, forgive us, and make us righteous in his sight. Sin does not get the last word; forgiveness is the last word. And, of course, once we are

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 172-173.

forgiven, we repent of what we have done in the past and purposefully strive to sin no more.

**Creeds and the Lord's Prayer.** Reciting the words of the creeds and praying the familiar Lord's Prayer is a reminder of what we believe and why we believe it. It also connects us with the body of Christ through the ages.

**Intercessory prayer.** A reminder that we pray for one another, are thankful for the joys that all of us share and lament those concerns that impact others who are in need.

**Scripture and sermon.** Reading the Scripture is a reminder of the timeless truths of God's word and how they can be applied to our lives today. The story of salvation as told in Scripture becomes a part of our story.

**Communion and Baptism.** These sacraments in our church are a reminder of God's grace being active in our lives, even before we were aware of just how much God is involved in our lives. Even for those who do not or cannot fully comprehend the meaning of baptism and/or the Lord's Supper can experience God's love and grace for themselves, just as countless generations have experienced before us.

**Singing.** "Throughout the history of the church, singing has been an important and life-giving practice. Through song we tell our story, offer praise and experience the joy that can only come through music. God designed us in such a way that sound and rhythm inspire and motivate us. Music touches us at an emotional and bodily level, and when it is used to offer praise to God, it connects us to the Trinity and each other in ways that teaching and preaching cannot."<sup>4</sup>

**Offering.** "Giving is itself an act of worship. This is not a way of paying for admission but of offering our gifts to God. The world tells us to look out for ourselves. Offering our gifts helps us let go of the need to store up treasures for ourselves."<sup>5</sup>

**Benediction and sending forth.** Of course, after worship comes the service. Our time to worship God results in a response on our part to go forth into the world and make disciples for Jesus Christ.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 183.