

Worship Continually

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Sermon Series: Seven Habits of a Disciple

1 Chronicles 16:28-34

“If there is an audience in worship, it is God.”

- Soren Kierkegaard

People claim they can worship God anywhere. For instance, they tell me they can worship God on a golf course, as well as in church. Well, yes, it's true; we can worship God anywhere. Jesus said, “The time is coming when true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). But who are we kidding? How often does worship take place on a golf course? I've been to golf courses and witnessed behavior that could not, in any stretch of the imagination, be called worship. People don't go to golf courses to worship. They go to play golf. We go to a golf course to play golf and to church to worship.

What is worship? I mean, really, what are we doing here?

Worship is not about you. Don't get me wrong. God designed worship to benefit you, but, fundamentally, worship is not about you.

Worship is not about this church. Worship is not designed to raise money for our budget, enlist your help as a volunteer or promote our programs.

Worship is about God. “Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples. Ascribe to the Lord, glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name” (1 Chronicles 16:28-29).

Worship originates from an old English word meaning to ascribe

worth or give value to something. Worship recognizes what God is worth and gives Him what He's worth.

God alone is worthy of our worship. No one else is worthy of such adulation. God alone is deserving of our praise.

In this consumer-driven society, we regard worship leaders as actors and the congregation as audience or critic. Actually, we have it backwards. We are the actors and God is the audience. Soren Kierkegaard said it this way: “If there is an audience in worship, it is God.”

The central question of worship is not, “How did the minister do today?” The question we should be asking ourselves is “How did I do in worship today?”

Heaven is the one place where worship occurs 24/7. The book of Revelation attests to the great multitude of heavenly hosts who worship in ceaseless praise. They are not lounging on clouds, strumming their harps of gold; they are worshipping. If that strikes you as boring, it may demonstrate how impoverished our idea of worship has become.

We have given far too much attention to worship style rather than to substance in the church. Should worship be contemporary or traditional? Our goal is to keep the main thing the main thing. God is the object of our worship.

How it is possible, when we express devotion to our team we are called fans, but when we demonstrate any amount of emotion in worship, we are called fanatic?

God is worthy of our worship; that's the theological rationale for worship. But there's also a psychological reason for worship. God created us for worship. Perhaps it strikes you as egotistical for God to summon us to worship. But if God is perfect and complete, lacking in nothing, there is nothing we can do or say that can add or subtract from God's being. God doesn't need our adulation.

If God is perfect and complete, lacking in nothing, what can God give beyond Himself to bring us satisfaction? We are created with the desire to enjoy God because there is nothing outside of God that can bring us such supreme joy.

When King David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, "He danced before the Lord with all his might" (2 Samuel 6:14). Have you ever seen a Presbyterian dance in worship? I'm not sure I've ever seen a Presbyterian move in worship!

We Presbyterians are so reserved. The customary posture for prayer in the first century was arms outstretched and head lifted to the sky.

I was riding the metro last Monday afternoon. The Washington Redskins were due to play their opening game a few hours later. The metro was filled with boisterous fans, decked out in burgundy and gold. Can someone explain to me how it is possible that when we express devotion to our team we are called fans, but when we demonstrate any amount of emotion in worship, we are called fanatic?

God's worthiness sets in bold relief our unworthiness. Adoration leads to confession. "Worship the Lord in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth" (16:30). We tremble in worship because we come as sinners. "Woe is me! I am lost," Isaiah cried, "for I am a man with unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5).

We have lost our sense of the holy in our worship. God is strictly our cosmic buddy and Jesus our best friend. Our confession is quick and perfunctory. We pray solely in terms of our mistakes and shortcomings. Alcoholics Anonymous has something to teach us here. We need to make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

The Book of Common Prayer supplies us with the classic prayer of confession: "Almighty and merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against your holy laws. We have left undone those things we ought to have done; and we have done those things we ought not to have done; and there is no health in us. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders." The 1979 version of *The Book of Common Prayer* eliminated the phrase "miserable offenders." As much as these words offend our modern sensibilities, we are apart from God's grace, "miserable offenders." Should we also expunge the word "wretch" from the hymn "Amazing Grace?" Maybe we should change

“You have to be incredibly happy to be sad in the right way.”

- Tim Keller

the word - “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a mistake-prone man like me.”

Forget the excuses. “Take off your shoes; the place you are standing is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5). “The Lord is in his holy temple; let the earth keep silence!” (Habakkuk 2:20).

You might think of confession as something morbid and deprecating. I regard it as liberating. I concur with something Tim Keller, Presbyterian pastor, said about confession: “You have to be incredibly happy to be sad in the right way.” Confession will seem threatening to us if we are trying to scale a ladder of virtue. But if we approach confession in the light of God’s unconditional love for us, we can make a searching and fearless inventory of our lives.

William Dyrness writes about the time as a boy when he inadvertently threw a snowball against the side of his family home and broke a window. He tiptoed inside, hoping his parents wouldn’t notice, even though it was the middle of winter. Later, his father said he wanted to show his son something. “He took me outside and pointed to the window I had broken—now with a fresh pane of glass in it. I don’t remember that my father said anything. But in this moment, my father made me realize two important lessons. First, he quietly made me acknowledge what I had done; something I was reluctant to do on my own. Second, he showed me that someone had gone to the trouble of

fixing the window. Someone had paid for my mistake.”

That’s what happens in confession. We come to acknowledge what we have done, even though we resist. We also recognize someone else paid the price for it.

Worship begins with adoration. Adoration moves to confession. Confession leads to proclamation. Preaching proclaims God’s pardon. “O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever” (16:34).

The work of a preacher is to proclaim the Word of God. You should be really, really glad that my sermons don’t rely on my insights alone. I depend upon God to use this book to direct my preaching.

Biblical preaching is in short supply in American churches today. Too many preachers read the morning lesson, close the book and begin riding their favorite hobby horse!

Theology has given way to anthropology these days. Sermons have become little more than self-help sessions.

You have a right to expect Biblical sermons from this pulpit, not mere psychobabble. We’ll say more about the Bible in next Sunday’s sermon.

Worship is adoration. Worship is confession. Worship is proclamation. Worship is response. “Bring an offering and come before him” (16:29).

In chapter 21 of First Chronicles, David is told by an angel of the Lord to build an altar. David

“I will not take for the Lord what is yours nor offer burnt offerings that cost me nothing” (1 Chronicles 21:24).

visits a nearby field and asks the land owner to sell him his land at full price. When the owner realizes King David is making the request, he offers David the land at no charge. David refuses, saying, “I will not take for the Lord what is yours nor offer burnt offerings that cost me nothing” (1 Chronicles 21:24).

We offer God something of value in worship. Our money is an offering. Our singing is an offering. This sermon is an offering. Our bodies are an offering. Paul writes in Romans, “...to present our bodies as a living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1). Every act of worship is an offering. We offer our whole selves to God in worship.

People will sometimes tell me, “I didn’t get anything out of worship.” Then answer me this question, what did you put into it?

Someone was leaving worship one day and said to the preacher, “Pastor, that was a wonderful sermon.” “That remains to be seen,” said the preacher. The real test of a sermon is whether it is practiced in real life.

There is a 4th century prayer, no one is quite sure who wrote it, which expresses the centrality of God in worship. This ancient prayer reminds me of the value of blending ancient and contemporary worship styles. There is richness in the old and vitality in the new.

Te Deum is Latin for “You are God.” Let’s conclude by praying the words of this ancient prayer:

“You are God and we praise you; you are the Lord and we acclaim you; You are the eternal Father; all creation worships you.

“To you all angels, all the powers of heaven, Cherubim and seraphim sing in endless praise, Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might; Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

“The glorious company of Apostles praise you; The noble fellowship of prophets praise you; The white-robed army of martyrs praise you.

“The Holy Church gives witness to you through the whole world; As the Father of immense majesty; Your true and only Son who is to be worshipped, And also the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.

“O Christ, you are the king of glory. You are the eternal son of the Father...By overcoming the sting of death, You opened the kingdom of heaven to believers. You sit at the right hand of God, In the glory of the Father....

“Save your people, Lord and bless your inheritance Govern them and lift them up forever.

“Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin.

“O Lord, have mercy upon us; have mercy upon us.

“O Lord, let your mercy lighten upon us, as our trust is in you. I have hoped in you, O Lord, Let me never be confounded.”

