

Hearing God's Word: Worship

Psalm 150
Romans 12:1-2

October 7, 2018
Faith Community

Over the past four weeks we looked at our church's logo. It's out there on our building, big enough for everyone traveling Ten Mile to see. It's on our stationery, our newsletter and our weekly bulletin. It's deceptively simple, which all good logos should be, but in reality is full of wonderful symbolism. All four parts of our mission statement are there:

Hearing
Trusting
Acting
Sharing

You'll find them listed and described on the back page of your bulletin.

Today marks the beginning of a deeper dive into those key words. We'll spend two weeks on each one, starting at the top and working our way down, knowing all the while that in reality a lifetime wouldn't be enough.

All this is designed to help you pray for your Pastor Nominating Committee and the eventual arrival of your new pastor. Hopefully he or she will see that you have a firm grasp on who you've been called to be and what you've been called to do.

We begin with 'Hearing.' Your mission statement says you hear the Word of God primarily through worship and study, so it's fitting that on this World Communion Sunday we focus on worship.

"It's not about you." That's how Rick Warren opens his mega best seller book, The Purpose Driven Life.

"The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It's far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born *by* his purpose and *for* his purpose."¹

¹ Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven Life: What On Earth Am I Here For? (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2002) p. 17

And friends, that is some of the best news you will ever hear. That's because it's so liberating. The more God focused, God filled, God infused, and God intoxicated you to become, everything changes, precisely because you change.

Some time ago I remember an older pastor giving wise advice to someone who was just starting out: "Always remember, the Messiah has come and it ain't you." Another way of putting that was the sign that my wife had on the wall of her office:

"God's most liberated servants are those who know they have nothing to prove." Imagine living like that. Imagine that kind of freedom.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)

Don't conform, but rather let yourself be transformed. With conforming you're in charge and more often than not settle for becoming just like everyone else. When you worship authentically, you open yourself to becoming a different person, even becoming more like Christ.

Here's what I know: you can go to church your entire life and still have no clue as to what the Christ filled life is about. Worship that transforms has little to do with showing up, standing up, sitting down, talk when you're supposed to, shut up the rest of the time, and throwing a buck or two in the plate.

Listen to this, from Annie Dillard:

"Why do we people in churches seem like cheerful, brainless tourists on a packaged tour of the Absolute?"

"On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet

hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return. ”²

Instead of that, listen to the exuberance:

**Hallelujah! Praise God in his holy house of worship,
praise him under the open skies;
Praise him for his acts of power, praise him for his
magnificent greatness;
Praise with a blast on the trumpet, praise by strumming
soft strings;
Praise him with castanets and dance, praise him with
banjo and flute;
Praise him with cymbals and a big bass drum, praise
him with fiddles and mandolin.
Let every living, breathing creature praise God!
Hallelujah!
(Psalm 150, TMSG)**

Acts of power
Magnificent greatness
Trumpet blast and soft strings
Castanets
Dance
Banjo
Flute
Cymbals, big bass drum
Fiddles and mandolin

And where do you do this: in a holy house of worship and under the open skies.

“Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”³

Friends, the world is desperate for what you and I take for granted. The world will change when you and I change.

² Annie Dillard, Teaching a Stone to Talk, pp. 52-3

³ C. S. Lewis, The Weight of Glory.

Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. (Romans 12:2, TMSG)

That kind of change happens in worship that places the liberating God at the very center of life.