

“COME, LET US WORSHIP.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: Psalm 95

Introduction:

As we mark the beginning of another church calendar year together it's a good time to reflect on what we are doing here and why. Why do we keep gathering here week in and week out, year in and year out for 116 years now? Habit? Tradition? Duty?

I remember playing high school football, whenever we lost a game on Friday night, we knew that Monday was going to be a rough practice. Our coach would make us spend hours going back to the fundamentals, back to the basics. That's not a bad thing to do when we have been worshipping together here for so long.

Worship is fundamental to human existence. Everyone on this planet worships someone or something. It is only a question of who or what; and who we worship will make all the difference in our lives. Someone once said, "Culture is religion externalized" (Henry Van Til).

What a person thinks and believes and worships will profoundly affect everything else in his life. And what a community of people think and believe and worship will affect everything else in that community, from morality to politics to economics to the legal system and education and art. Culture is the outward expression of a person's or a nation's faith and worship. If it worships man, it will be humanistic. If it worships Allah, it will be an Islamic culture.

One way you can tell what the underlying religion of a culture is, just look at its blasphemy laws. What are you not allowed to do or say? Every culture has them. In our country those laws are changing. Now they are called hate laws and hate crimes. They tell us what we cannot touch, what is sacred, they point to what is at the center of belief. And those laws will continue to change as a reflection of what our culture increasingly values and thinks is most important.

"Worship is the basic tool of formation, as we worship so we will believe, and value. If our worship is self-centered, we will be self-centered. If our worship is entertainment or another form of consumerism, that's what we will value. If it is sentimental or shallow, so will our souls be. And if it lifts up a holy and majestic and noble God we will be lifted up as well" (R.J. Snell).

We cannot rise above the nature and character of what we worship. Nor can a nation. Psalm 95 like many of the Psalms is a call to worship and a call to worship a particular God.

The Call to Worship, vss. 1-2, 6.

Six times the psalmist calls us, saying "Let us..."

Psalm 95:1-2, 6 Let us sing to the Lord;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
2 Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
6 Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

Worship is a personal engagement with God through faith in Jesus Christ enabled by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

Worship is a inward response of awe, reverence and respect, and an outward response of praise, adoration and obedience. It is always active, not passive. It is not a spectator experience.

Worship is moving from a heart of self-centeredness to a heart of God-centeredness. Worship is acknowledging that there is one holy living sovereign God over us and we are completely dependent on Him.

Worship deals with the question of ultimate allegiance. Who is king, yourself, or God? Who do you live for, yourself or God? Who is your authority, my will or Thy will be done?

That's why I have said before, what we do here on Sunday mornings is really a subversive act, we are saying that our ultimate allegiance is not to our country or our flag or our government, but to God and God alone. In God we trust.

This is why Christianity is oppressed in communist countries and countries under dictators and tyrants. They get it, they understand Christian worship is about allegiance and authority. That's why in Caesar's Rome they branded Christians as traitors and enemies of the state.

Worship is declaring our allegiance, declaring who made us and who we belong to, who is over us and in control of our lives and to whom we owe everything.

Ultimately true worship isn't about style or preferences or which songs or music we like or what people wear or how good the preacher is. To come to worship is to come into God's presence to give honor and show gratitude.

Why do we worship? Vss. 3-5, 7.

Having issued six calls to worship the psalmist doesn't leave us there, but gives us two grounds or reasons for worship, for why we come each week to corporate worship.

Did you notice the word "for" in verse 3 and 7?

3 **For** the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

4 In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.

5 The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.

7 **For** he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

The **first reason** we should joyfully come and worship God is because God is great, He is *the* great God, the God above all other gods, the one before whom all other gods are nothing. God is the supreme God. There is no one more worthy of praise and worship.

And just in case you are wondering about the meaning of these other gods, Psalm 96 clarifies:

Psalm 96:4-5 For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods.
5 For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens.

All other gods are human inventions, made with human hands or human hearts, for themselves. They are inventions of fallen imaginations, vain delusions. Only God is God. When we worship Him we are magnifying His supremacy, we are making much of His greatness.

The psalmist expands on the greatness of God by showing **how** God is great. Here is your proof; God does what no other god can do.

4 In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.
5 The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.

God is the creator and maker of all things. He personally formed and fashioned the earth, from the deepest depths to the highest heights. And He didn't just set it all in motion billions of years ago and let it go. He is personally involved with every inch, with every aspect, every seed, every cell, every molecule, He has it all in His hands.

God fuels and controls the molten core of our planet. The sea and all that is in it is under His undisputed divine control. He carved the channels, dug out the oceans and filled them with floods of waters. He is the master of every wave. With His finger He drew the dividing line between the sea and the land.

As a potter molds the clay, so God formed and fashioned islands and continents, cut valleys and piled up mountains, decided where the great plains and fertile fields should be and the great desert wastelands. He is great because everything and everyone owes their existence to Him.

This universe we inhabit is completely and radically God-centered and therefore it is all God-glorifying. It's all about Him. If your eye is good and your heart is right then you will see everything in this universe is cause for worshipping God.

The beauty of these flowers and the windows, the structural integrity of this building, the wonder of a baby's birth, the grace of a long life, the gift and skill and musicians, the preachers who tells us these things, the eyes, ears, minds and hearts to take it all in, all are cause to worship.

The glory of God fills the earth and inhabits all creation which means every waking moment of our lives is surrounded with cause for worship. If you are here and you can't think of a reason to worship God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, you are in serious darkness or depression or rebellion against God.

The psalmist gives a *second reason* to worship, the best reason.

6 Oh *come, let us worship* and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

7 *For* he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

As the earth and all that is in it is the Lord's, so also we are the Lord's. He uses covenant language. In the covenant God says, "I will be their God and they shall be my people" (Exodus 19:5ff; Jeremiah 31:33).

This is even greater cause for worship. We worship because we have been adopted by God's free grace to be included in His family and to have a relationship with Him.

Through no work or merit of our own, God has raised up children for Himself, people called out of the world through faith in Jesus Christ to be His spiritual children.

The same hand that dug the seas and pulled up the mountains, works for us, forming and shaping, protecting and providing. God's fatherly love, care and protection, all His abundant blessings must certainly compel us to come and worship. We are blessed above all people. Who will not worship and bow down?

What if we don't like something in worship? Vss. 8-11.

The psalmist has just shown us how all of life, creation and our salvation, are all cause for worship, yet there are some people who turn it to cause for complaining, murmuring against God. In the midst of God's goodness somehow their hearts grow hard.

The psalmist is referring to the children of Israel in the wilderness with Moses. They doubted God and they questioned whether God would provide for them.

8 do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,
9 when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

"Sure God delivered us through the Red Sea on dry ground and killed all our enemies, but that was months ago. What has He done for us lately? That was then, what about now? We are hungry and thirsty out here in the wilderness, we are dying out here, where is God now?"

The psalmist warns when it comes to worship, don't be like that. Given who God is and what God has done and all we know about His character and nature, don't rebel, don't put God to the

test, don't be disobedient. Don't grumble and complain. Think about this in the context of worship.

What should we do if we don't like something in a worship service?

Should we complain to as many people as will listen or to our family over Sunday lunch?
Should we write a letter to the worship planning team or our district elder?
Should we just sit through it and not participate? Or find a different church?

If you find yourself being negative about worship, ask yourself some questions. Who is it about? Who is it for? Is it possible God wanted to say something to you through that particular worship service that particular day, but you missed it? Did Satan use something you didn't like to distract you from what God was doing?

Don't let Satan steal your joy and don't let him steal your worship. Take what has been prepared and offer it up to God, ask Him to speak to your heart through it, however humble it might be.

A team of your brothers and sisters in Christ take hours each week to pray and prepare a service of worship. Then they meet every two weeks, and we pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help us and guide us as we go over the services, and make changes and improvements. It is a divine/human exercise. We ask for the Holy Spirit to rule and over rule everything we do. We don't claim any perfection, just humbly and faithfully seeking to glorify God and offer something that will edify His people.

Pray for us, pray with the realization that it's not about us and our preferences but about God and what God desires and what God is doing in our whole flock.

Don't be one to complain, and don't participate in conversations where that is happening. I have never forgotten the warnings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his classic book, *Life Together*.

If we complain against our church we will soon complain against God. God never put us in His church to become the accuser of it. Rather we are to pray for our church and our own souls and examine what is lacking in us that might make us petty or critical. We shouldn't complain about what isn't but rather thank God for what He has given us.

What may appear weak and foolish or imperfect to us may be great and glorious to God who delights to use such things for His glory and for our good if we will receive it from Him humbly.

Fight against hardness of heart with humble gratitude and thanksgiving. Fight hardness with humility, with openness, with obedience. Fight hardness with responsiveness to God and the work of His Spirit.

Worship that is acceptable to God is worship that is offered from a heart that is soft, open, responsive, submitted, a heart full of Spirit and truth.

Recognize that God can and does use all things, and works through all things and all people to do His work, and His ways for doing it are often very different than ours. What seems dull or boring or imperfect to us is just exactly what someone else needed at that moment.

Implications and applications.

How can you better prepare for worship with the possibility of getting more out of it?

Worship is spiritual work so there is spiritual work to be done as we come to it. Prepare your heart.

Drop the language of “going to church” on Sunday mornings. When you speak to one another about Sunday morning, when you are talking with your spouse or children or grandchildren, say “It’s time to go to worship.” Come, let us go to worship our God. Make it personal, make it intimate, make it real, make it important.

When you get here pray. Don’t read all the stuff in your box, pray for yourself. If you receive nothing, is it because you asked for nothing, because you didn’t ask the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart?

Pray for our worship planners, for Nancy, Katrina, Sharon, Bev, Rick, Barry and me.

Pray about whether you would be willing to be part of this special and important work. With two or three more members each one would only have to prepare one service a month.

Pray for our musicians who practice and practice and prepare and sacrifice. Pray for our elders and deacons who lead us in prayer, pray for your pastors who week in and week out seek God’s guidance on what to preach.

This is a holy thing we are doing here, this is holy ground in the presence of a holy God, let us tremble before Him. And let us resist the enemy of all that is holy, who seeks to distract or tear down or make our hearts and minds wander.

To know God and to worship God is the source of the greatest possible joy and goodness. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Let what we do together in this place be the beginning of our joy.

6 Come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

7 For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.