

Here We Are To Worship

Exodus 20:1-11

Luke 4:14-19

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World Communion Sunday

First Federated Church

Peoria, Illinois

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Text: *And he (Jesus) came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his habit, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day... (vs. 16)*

I'm sure that you've heard it said, "I can worship God anywhere. I can even worship God on the golf course." Well, whenever I'm on the golf course I frequently hear God's name invoked. Jesus' name has even been thrown out a time or two. But, I can't say that I've ever heard either spoken in a worshipful manner.

It is also true that Jesus did encourage his disciples to worship at all times and in all places; "Look at the birds of the air," "Look at the lilies of the field." But he never said this was worship. It is devotion, reflection and contemplation, but it is not worship. By definition, worship is a gathering of people seeking to praise the One from whom all blessings flow.

Jesus was able to point to the birds of the air and the lilies of the field as signs of God's grace and care *because* he was firmly grounded in the *habit* of weekly worship in the Temple or Synagogue.

This morning's Gospel lesson points us to the fact that Jesus had the "habit of worship." In other words, it was customary, routine for him to join the assembly of people who went to the Temple to worship.

A couple of weeks ago I shared with you an insight that Marilyn Robinson wrote in her most recent book Home.

"God does not need our worship. We worship to enlarge our sense of the holy, so that we can feel and know the presence of the Lord, who is with us always." (Marilyn Robinson, Home, p. 110, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, c. 2008)

There are three reasons why we need worship. **We need worship for us, for our children and for our communities.**

For Us

Last month we explored how we are hardwired to be a part of a community. No one is an island. No one can stand alone. This world is too big. Solo acts, in life's journey, flame out. When people begin to withdraw, isolate themselves, their humanity dies. It should come as no surprise that people who suddenly "go postal" as people say; people who suddenly snap and go on a rampage are described by their neighbors as "a quiet person who largely stuck to themselves." Solitary confinement is the most brutal of all punishments. Abusers isolate their victims from others.

St. Augustine once said that our souls are restless until they find rest in God.

Jesus had the habit of worship because he knew he had to feed his spiritual as well as his physical self. Jesus developed the habit of worship because he knew that he was a part of a people.

You know, as a rule, people do not lose their faith suddenly. They may get knocked off of their game by one of life's hard knocks, but they generally recover. A sense of faith is lost slowly, like helium leaking out of a Kevlar balloon. We can float for a while but little by little we begin to descend into an emotional and spiritual abyss.

We need worship, as Marilynne Robinson wrote, "to enlarge our sense of the holy, so that we can feel and know the presence of the Lord, who is with us always." In other words, we need to be reminded regularly to "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow."

Here's a footnote: We often forget that Jesus was Jewish. His habit of worship was formed by the Jewish tradition. In his day, and even today, it is a Jewish custom to begin your worship preparations the day before—or the night before worship. There is a time was set aside as a time for preparation. In other words, if you want to develop the habit of worship on Sunday morning, you'd better plan your Saturday night accordingly!

For Our Children

Someone once told me that one of their happier memories as a child occurred on Sunday morning. On Sunday morning his mom and dad would each hold one of his hands and lift him up so that he could jump over the cracks in the sidewalk as they walked from their car to the church. That's a little thing, but now years later, is a very big thing today. Even though he can no longer hold their hands, it gave him an image of the church as being a place where people will take you by the hand to lift you up over the broken places in life. You cannot avoid the broken places, but you don't have to stumble and fall.

We need to worship for our children's sake.

As a rule, parents want what's best for their children. Parents will make unbelievable personal sacrifices for the sake of their children. If need be, they will even give up their life for their children.

Years ago I attended a workshop by a man named Dale Milligan, who started a church youth program called "Youth Club," now "Logos." In the workshop he stated that every parent wants the best for their children. We want our children to fulfill their dreams and to go as far as they can in life. If they have a dream of playing professional sports, we will sign them up for traveling teams and give up our weekends. If they want to be a concert musician, we will spare no expense. We will sign them up for SAT and ACT prep courses.

He went on to say, though, that the overwhelming majority of our kids will not achieve the greatness to which they aspire. Of the 30 teams in the NFL there is only room for 1500 players. There are more kids playing JFL in Peoria and the surrounding area this fall than who play in the NFL!

Milligan went on to say that he didn't mean that we should discourage our children from pursuing their dreams, but we should be sure that in the pursuit of the dream that we do not lose sight of the fact that disappointment is a fact of life. And even if they do fulfill their dream, disappointment, heartache and loss will come into their lives.

How prepared will they be when someone they love says that they do not love them anymore, when they lose a job and wonder who they really are, when they receive a bad report from a doctor, when a loved one dies, or when they face their own death. We

need to ask ourselves, “Are we as diligent in giving our children the spiritual tools of life’s certitudes as we are in helping them pursue their dreams?”

You know, it was not by accident that Jesus often quoted Scripture. He faced down temptation quoting Scripture; “Thou shalt not live by bread alone” and “You shall not tempt the Lord your God.” He stood before death’s gate with a prayer from the Psalms on his lips, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” Although he was not able to finish that Psalm, he no doubt knew it by heart. He had heard it in the Temple many times. It ends with words of promise and hope; “Posterity shall serve him; people shall tell of the Lord to the coming generation, and proclaim God’s deliverance to a people yet unborn.” (22:30)

He didn’t know Scripture simply because He was God’s Son. He knew it because he learned in the home and heard it in the community at worship.

Remember, worship was a part of his family’s life together. When he was eight days old his parents took him to the Temple to be circumcised. When he was old enough to be bar mitzvah he was comfortable enough with the ways of the Temple to be with the rabbis when his parents lost track of him. In all of these events we clearly see that his parents instilled in him the habit of worship.

For our communities

I am somewhat surprised that more people do not realize that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall were caused by spiritual forces.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s book The Gulag Archipelago, which, roughly translated means “The Soul and Barbed Wire” foretold the fall of the Soviet Union because it could not spiritually sustain itself.

On November 9, 1989 the world witnessed something that many never thought that they would ever see, the fall of the wall separating east and west Berlin. In the book of essays The Fall of the Berlin Wall (Peter Schweizer, ed., Hoover Institution Press, c. 1989), the authors note that there were three principle factors in the fall of that infamous wall; *glasnost*, the opening of the border between Hungary and Austria and the Church.

The Church was arguably the most important of the three factors. The Wall began to crumble when people gathered in Leipzig at the bombed out shell of The Church of Remembrance to worship God. Then, a few days later, people left the Second Lutheran Church in East Berlin with hammers in hand and marched toward the wall that had decided their city for too long. No longer were they going to tolerate the city’s division.

In order to subdue a people you must first crush their spirit and in over 2000 years the Christian spirit has never been crushed, not in the former Soviet Union, not in the Peoples’ Republic of China, not in the Democratic Peoples’ Republic of Korea, no where. In the words of Martin Luther, *A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing, our present help amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing. And though this world, with devils filled, Should threaten to undo us, We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us.*

Worship helps us develop our sense of the holy. When we lose that sense of the holy, something in us dies.

Jesus kept his life centered on God because he developed the habit of worship. And, he once said to his disciples, a servant is no better than his master. If Jesus needed to worship, what makes us think that we don’t?