

## *Called to Worship Together*

Community - III

May 7, 2017

Scripture Reading: Genesis 22:1-12

This morning we are continuing our series “A Well-Balanced Church is a Healthy Church,” continuing to look at the 4<sup>th</sup> foundational pillar – Community. Just to refresh your memory a little, the four foundational pillars of the church are:

1. Worship
2. Mission
3. Discipleship
4. Community

Actually, there is a lot of overlap between the four. We started a few months ago with Worship and our message today, on community, is entitled “Called to Worship Together.” Actually worship is all encompassing. It is why we do the other three.

The very first time one of the words for worship is used in the Bible is in Genesis 22, our Scripture reading for this morning, when Abraham was told by God to offer his Son, Isaac, as a sacrifice back to Him. Quite a different act of worship than we understand worship today.

Actually the two Hebrew words used for worship in the Old Testament are quite different than many understand worship to mean today.

One, (hawa or shachah), means to bow down low; prostrate oneself; to pay one honor or homage.

The other (abad) – to work, to serve, to labor. The same Hebrew word is used for farming – “to be plowed, be cultivated, to be worked.”

Worship is supposed to be everything that we do. It is supposed to be what we give back to God for what He has done for us. And for Christians, since Jesus gave everything in his death on the cross, that which God sacrificed – His one and only Son, that which he relieved Abraham from having to do, our response is supposed to be to give everything of ourselves in return.

The great evangelist Billy Graham, in the last book he wrote, entitled Salvation: The Reason for My Hope, says “God not only saves us from something, he also saves us for something.”

Ultimately God doesn’t save us for our sake, he saves us for His sake and for the sake of others. Worship is our response to what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

Even before the Israelites were delivered from Egyptian bondage, they had heard from Moses and Aaron that God was concerned about them and was going to deliver them, it says, “When they heard that the LORD was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they “bowed down and worshiped” (Exodus 4:31). Take note of the pronouns, “they,” “them,” and “theirs.”

At the end of David's reign as king and after the offerings had been received for the building of the temple that would be built by his son, Solomon, David prays a prayer of thanksgiving and blessing for God's people after which it says, "they all praised the LORD, the God of their fathers; they bowed low and fell prostrate before the LORD and the king." (1 Chronicles 29:20). Again, note the pronouns.

For those that might be following along with our Bible reading schedule, we just read through Nehemiah in the O.T. and the rebuilding of God's temple in Jerusalem. After the temple was rebuilt, at its dedication, after the priest and prophet Ezra stood up to read God's word, it says, "all the people lifted their hands and responded, 'Amen!' 'Amen!'" Then they "bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground" (Nehemiah 8:6).

The Psalms are full of expressions of worship, like that from our Call to Worship this morning from Psalm 95:6, "O Come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our maker."

After God had led his people from the bondage and slavery in Egypt, he gathered them at Mt. Sinai, where he laid down for them His requirements and guidelines for how they were to live their lives, including what their worship of Him should look like. By His grace and mercy He had delivered them. It was nothing that they had earned. He had chosen them. He had called them to Himself, and he told them how they were to live within the freedom He had given them.

And while God's original people, the Israelites, were supposed to worship God with every aspect of their lives as individuals, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might," (Deut. 6:5), they were also called to worship Him collectively, at specific times, like on the Sabbath in their local communities and on special days when they had to come to the temple.

For one to worship God properly, he or she has to have a relationship with God. Communal worship is a place of meeting, a time of interaction between God and his people. Worship is ultimately about the object of our worship, that being God Himself. Whenever it becomes anything less than that, like about ourselves, our preferences, or the different aspects of worship, and not about God, then we have lost focus on what worship is supposed to be about. That's when we worship the created as opposed to the creator, and that type of worship is unacceptable to God.

The God of Old Testament times is the same God of the New Testament times in which we find ourselves in today. For the most part, with the exception of all the animal sacrifices and priests having to serve as intermediaries, what God required of His people back then, He still requires of His people today. God's people in O.T. times were the Israelites whom He had chosen to deliver from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. God's people in N.T. times are all people whom He has chosen to be delivered from the bondage of our sin through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

The only thing that has really changed is that we now worship God through Jesus Christ, the long awaited promised Messiah, the one in whom all the fullness of God dwells and came to dwell among us. One of the first references to worship in the N.T. is when the Magi came seeking the

one who had been born, the King of the Jews. Their whole purpose of seeking Him was to worship Him. Upon finding Him it says that “they bowed down and worshiped him. They opened their treasures and presented him with gifts” (Matthew 2:11-12).

Unfortunately for many today, our worship of God is very skewed and individualized. For many it revolves around just one or two elements of the worship service – for many it’s music, others the sermon, for some the offering is an important part as well, and other elements.

Yes, we are called by God to worship Him individually, even with our entire lives, but we are also called by God to worship Him collectively, as the body of believers whom He has called together to be in community with.

Unity is a very important aspect of the New Testament church, found throughout the entire New Testament. Jesus himself in his great prayer found in the Gospel of John 17, as he’s praying for his disciples who will be the ones who will start the church after He is gone:

*“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you . . . May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”*  
John 17:20-21, 23 (NIV)

And from Ephesians which I said a couple of weeks ago is what many believe to be the ideal of what the church was and is supposed to look like for all time:

*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*  
Ephesians 4:1-6

Then the Apostle Paul goes on to write about the gifts that God sends upon His people in the church, particularly the five-fold ministry calling of Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd and Teacher which we looked at a couple weeks ago with one primary goal in mind:

*12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.* Ephesians 4:12-13 (NIV)

A little bit later in Ephesians, chapter 5, he writes:

*18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*  
Ephesians 5:18-21 (NIV)

Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs!

The worship wars that have been a part of many churches, including ours – though we probably wouldn't call ours a war, perhaps a lingering skirmish – are really an affront to God and especially His Son, Jesus Christ who came and gave his life on the cross to unify God's people, otherwise known today as the "body of Christ," or "the church."

At Wednesday evening's worship committee meeting, in which the worship committee, upon the recommendation of the Elder Team made the decision to go to one service once again for the summer (May 28 – Sept. 3), I shared a recent posting by a man by the name of Mike Harland, a man who has both studied different worship styles and been a practitioner, serving as a worship/music leader in several congregations over many years. Based on his experience these are his observations:

- The lack of unity in worship is an indictment on the worship that is happening in many churches today.
- You cannot build unity in a church around a music style.
- Because of music style trends, we've seen a generational segregation in the church.
- By naming a service after a style, including a style of music, you're setting it up to disappoint the attendees.
- When you name a service based on stylistic worship, you're painting yourself into a corner.
- Worship planning is spiritual preparation, not just musical preparation.
- Worship is our response to God's revelation.

So, if God is the same, yesterday, today and tomorrow, and God hasn't changed, and if one of His priorities of His people is that they collectively worship Him at various times, what are some of the elements that seem to be pretty consistent throughout the Bible? I have been able to come up with six, they are on your insert this morning:

1. Confession. Confession is something that seems to be lacking in many churches today, including our own. But almost always, before God's people came to worship Him, they confessed their own sin, acknowledged that without God they are nothing, and it was often symbolized by bowing down, prostrating oneself, kneeling, and confessing.
2. The reading of God's Word has always been an important element of worship for God's people, both in Old Testament times and New Testament times. In Nehemiah, at the worship service dedicating the rebuilt temple, it says they read from the Word of God for ½ the day. That's not counting any of the other elements of the worship service that day. And you people get antsy when we start approaching one hour 😊
3. An offering. Taking an offering, giving God's people an opportunity to bring their gifts to support the upkeep of the temple and its servants, and to extend God's work outside the temple, or the church, to help the poor, has always been an important part of worship of God.
4. Singing. It's throughout the entire Bible. But just maybe, that passage from Ephesians and a very similar one in Colossians, captures what God desires the most, *psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*.
5. Prayer, in many different forms has always been present in communal worship.
6. Fellowship. Some type of fellowship, referred to in Acts as "the breaking of bread," which was at times the act of communion and other times an entire fellowship meal.

Those are the elements of communal worship that seem to be present throughout biblical history. And hence they should be included in most worship services, if we are to offer worship that honors God. There is really no specific order when it comes to N.T. worship. So what we want to do over the summer is to try and create a service that doesn't follow the exact order of either the 9:00 a.m. or the 11:10 a.m. service but presents something new. That which brings in what is best from both services. That we bring psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Mostly that it brings praise, glory, thanks and honor to God. And it unites us in Christ, because it is impossible to honor God if we are not united in Christ. And we need to remember that N.T. worship, due to Christ's death on the cross and His resurrection, and the sending of the Holy Spirit from heaven, is from even beyond us. There words from the N.T. reading of yesterday, Hebrews 12:18-29 (NIV):

*<sup>18</sup> You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; <sup>19</sup> to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, <sup>20</sup> because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death." <sup>21</sup> The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."*

*<sup>22</sup> But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, <sup>23</sup> to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, <sup>24</sup> to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

*<sup>25</sup> See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? <sup>26</sup> At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." <sup>27</sup> The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.*

*<sup>28</sup> Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, <sup>29</sup> for our "God is a consuming fire."*

Let us Pray: