

“ROOTED in Worship: Part II”

NT: John 13:1-15  
Romans 12:9-21

How many of us (you can raise your hand) see, think, and believe that the world, or at least some things in the world, need improvement; need to be better? I do not mean building renovations or landscaping projects. I am talking values and principles displayed in the world. Yes. No. Maybe.

Well, today I want to continue talking about one way I think we can start (and it is really a continuation because God has been in this business for a really long time) a revolution of improvement: By participating in and embodying the worship of God. Last week we defined more of what Christian worship is and why it is important. Today, I want to unpack more of the how we worship and to what extent we know our worship experience is not only informative but transformative.

Last week I began by saying worship is the one essential activity that must take precedence over every other activity in life. There is a common illustration I, and Kathleen as well, have eluded to that helps unpack this. I use it as the base of the “Priorities” themed Immerse devotional I wrote as a part of my doctoral studies. If you are interested, the entire Immerse series can be found on our church website within resources and Spiritual Growth.

The illustration is done by a professor at the front of a classroom. With rocks in a jar, the professor asks the students if the jar is full. A quick glance would suggest it is. The professor proceeds to add some more smaller rocks to the jar, shaking it to help fill in some of the gaps. The professor then asks again if the jar is full. A quick glance again would suggest it is. The professor proceeds to add some sand to the jar, shaking it again to help fill in the gaps. The professor then asks again if the jar is full. Surely the jar is full now everyone thinks. The professor proceeds to slowly add some water to the jar and everyone watches closely as the water fills every pocket of air remaining in the jar.

The professor proceeds: "What is the point of this illustration?" One eager student, confident they had it all figured out, raised his hand and said, "The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you try really hard, you can always fit some more things into it!" "No," the professor replied, "that's not the point. The truth this illustration teaches us is if you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all."

What are the big rocks in life? That is and is not a rhetorical question. The big rocks in life are God, family, and friends. Some might argue work and school as well, but I think it is hard to argue that work and school verses God and family is really an equal weight balance, especially when talking about value and worth and meaning.

As I talk about God as one of those big rocks, I am also including with God all the things associated with building and sustaining a healthy relationship with God. More specifically today I am talking about worship. And I don't just mean worship as a reserved time on Sunday morning in which we come to this particular place at a particular time to do particular liturgical and ritual practices like pray, confess, sing, listen to God's Word read and proclaimed, celebrate the sacraments, and bring our offering. I am also talking about worshiping God in our daily life.

Worship in a sacred place like this carries great value and meaning to us all as it is here that we center our spiritual beings, giving honor and praise to God as someone we truly value and treasure. Our worship here is an expression of what and how we feel about who God is and all God does. However, the full act of worship is not complete if our worship of God remains captive here. "All of life is the outshining of what you truly value and cherish and treasure. Therefore, all of life is worship. Either of God, or something else."

Like we did with love a few weeks ago, I want to begin with the end in mind today. What would we need to see in the world today to know that improvements have taken place? Having an idea of where we would like to go will help us plan and take the necessary steps to get there.

As you can imagine, there are many descriptions available to us as to what a faithful life looks like, but one of the clearest comes from Paul in his letter to the Romans. He says the marks of one who genuinely participates in the life of God, which includes worship, are these:

**Read Romans 12:9-21**

Clayton Schmit, in a book of compiled works that support the transformative intent of worship called "Worship that Changes Lives," writes that these are the signs that help determine the spiritual effects of those engaged regularly in Christian worship. As Christians, we may not be able to exhibit all of these characteristics or accomplish them with consistency even, but those of us who are engaged in spiritual experiences, such as regular attendance at worship and a habit of prayer and devotion, place themselves in the path of the Spirit's wind. As the Spirit blows in and around us during those experiences, we stand a chance at having our lives changed. Wind, however benign it may seem, has an erosive effect. In time it will reshape a rock, a hill, or a mountain. The Spirit blows where it wills and reshapes the lives of those

encountered. This is the kind of spiritual transformation that leads people to imitate Christ and to participate in the life of God. (Clayton Schmit, "Worship that Changes Lives" ed. by Alexis Abernethy, pg. 37)

In the effort of living a faithful life, there must be a source of information and inspiration that helps identify and form our life as we grow. Some refer to it as their true north. As Christians, our true north for a faithful life follows and embodies the example of Jesus Christ. And the source of information for encountering and engaging the life of Jesus Christ is the Gospel. And the main source or activity we participate in to encounter and engage the Gospel is worship.

There is an overwhelming consensus amongst scholars that there are two core elements of Christian worship held in an ecclesial setting such as this: the reading and preaching of God's Word and celebrating the sacraments. This is evident even in titles for pastors. When I was ordained, I became a Minister of Word and Sacrament. All the rest of the elements we include in worship like prayer and singing hang on these two.

After hundreds of years of practicing worship, worship has taken on many different styles. As we discussed some last week in defining the eight transcultural elements making up Christian worship, as Christianity has spread across the world, various cultures have begun to worship God in styles that make the most cultural sense. Worship here at First Presbyterian is a Service of the Lord's Day and it is framed theologically by first gathering as God's people called to worship God, secondly hearing God's Word read and proclaimed, thirdly responding to God's Word, and fourthly being sent out by God empowered to worship God in our daily life. Elements of worship like sacraments, music, prayers, confession, affirmation of faith, and offering find their place in each of these four frames. For all of those gathered communally for worship, one element of worship to the next is intended to invite, provoke, challenge, transform, and empower an excellent glorification of God.

Then what? The clock strikes 9:30 or 11:30 or noon and, having gotten a good break from everything out there, we just go back to life as we know it, praying we are able to endure and survive to another Sunday? I hope not. Then what happens next?

One writer reflects, "It can be easy to have a heart filled with worship on a Sunday morning as the church band is playing your favorite song. But then comes Monday morning's commute and Tuesday afternoon's pile of laundry. How do we maintain a heart of worship in the daily grind?"

Worshiping God on Sunday mornings in community with others in this place and this time is the main source of what and how to glorify God the rest of the week. "Worship is about

making believers into the agents of God's dramatic purposes in the world. Worship, when it is vital, stimulates the agency of God's people." (William Dyrness, "A Primer on Christian Worship)

One of the ways worship does this is in the celebration of baptism and the Lord's Supper as sacraments. Sacraments are a visual element of worship we celebrate in this place, usually at designated times, but they are not intended to remain here. We celebrate baptism and the Lord's Supper to be reminded of God's love for us and to be empowered to share God's love with others. The celebration of the sacraments is thus incomplete if we do not then embody their power and hope in our daily life.

Let us consider baptism. It is not enough to have water poured on our heads or even be dunked in the river. The celebratory act is the catalyst to a life lived in covenant with God. We are called to live out our baptismal vows, which first call us to turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its presence in the world. Secondly, we are to profess our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Thirdly, relying on God's grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are to be Christ's faithful disciple by obeying God's Word, showing God's love, and teaching God's ways to our children and others. Our chosen and adopted identity as God's beloved children is to be witnessed in our daily life as an outpouring of the transformative empowerment by the Holy Spirit practiced here in this place.

Now, let us consider the Lord's Supper. As a precursor to the last supper, we read in John 13 that Jesus washed the disciples' feet. While they were having dinner at the table, the disciples were having a conversation about who was going to be sitting right next to Jesus in heaven. They wanted to know who had first seat. In Christ-like manner, Jesus got up and showed them. After showing them, he told them: "I have set for you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. If you do these things, you are blessed if you do them." It is this example of washing others' feet that tops the list for defining servant leadership. Many bring in the theology of "the last shall be first" into this. The disciples at the table were in a spiritual experience of worship with Jesus. As their feet were washed, the Holy Spirit was entering their hearts and minds and bodies strengthening them to do so likewise. It was going to be up to them now to embody that act of worship as a gift to be shared with others.

After Jesus prepared the disciples by washing their feet, Jesus continued with the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup. Like baptism, celebrating the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as a part of worship is also not meant to stay here. As we gather in community to remember the sacrifice Jesus made for all humanity, we are united with believers everywhere and empowered to celebrate the love and grace Jesus' sacrifice symbolizes. John Calvin said the sacrament of the Lord's Supper "is a visible form of an invisible grace." Jesus made grace visible, and as Jesus' faithful disciples, gifted with the power and presence of the Holy Spirit as

a gift from Jesus, we too are called to be the visible instruments, vessels, and prisms of God's grace to the world. "It is not only the church that explains the Eucharist and its practices and theories. The ways in which we live in the world also explain the Eucharist and the Church."

(Claudio Carvalhaes, "Eucharist and Globalization")

*Our lives were meant to be concerts of sorts. We were meant to sing of God's mercy, grace, compassion, and presence. We do not sing simply as an act of appreciation but also as an act of proclamation. Beyond that, the song is made up of different parts—each of which points back to God. The verses are mixtures of experiences and attempts at expressing their power to us. The song is both a cry of adoration from our hearts of this great God we serve and an invitation to those listening to come and sing with us. We sing loudest and clearest when we serve others. Our lives are literally arrows pointing toward God. Our service to others is among our greatest opportunity to worship God.*

King David proclaimed the completeness of worship in Psalm 34:1-3:

*I will praise the Lord at all times; His praise will always be on my lips.  
I will boast in the Lord; the humble will hear and be glad.  
Proclaim Yahweh's greatness with me; let us exalt His name together.*

The dawning of each new day presents us with the opportunity to worship God in all God's glory. What does that worship of God look like? Two options include:

- A. Praise the Lord! Whatever you do, praise the Lord! Talk the talk and walk the walk! Invite others to come alongside you and exalt God together! (Psalm 34:1-3)
- B. First, recognize God's claim and call on your life. Acknowledge God's presence with you and give praise and thanksgiving. Next, turn to the pages of scripture and see what God has to offer to you. Pray that God's Word and God's promises are a lamp unto your feet and a light unto your path. Next, respond to God's greatness by committing yourself and the daily events to God and the opportunity to be God's instrument. Next, trust God's Spirit to empower you throughout the day.

Prayer: O God, help us to worship you at all times. There is nothing that we want more than to approve what is most worthy, and value what is most valuable, and treasure what is most precious and admire what is most beautiful and hate what is most evil and abhor what is most ugly. We reckon ourselves dead to all that is unspiritual and worldly and deadening to our souls. Renew us, O God. Awaken spiritual capacities of right assessment. Take us all, body and soul, and make us the instruments of your glory in the world. Let the renewal you are working from within show on the outside. Let all God's people say... Amen.