

“Being the Church that WORSHIPS”

NT: Acts 10:44-48
John 15:9-16
1 John 5:1-6

Worship is defined most as the act of praising, honoring, and glorifying God. Therefore, worship cannot be and is not just an event we observe on Sunday (or Wednesday) (or any other single gathering when people come together with a common calling from God or belief in God). Worship is a way of life. Being the Church that worships is being the Church that lives for God, bringing praise, honor, and glory to God throughout life.

I love how scholar Claudio Carvalhaes considers the role of worship as a part of life? He asks, “What’s worship got to do with it?” What a great question to ask ourselves as we live? Just like we might ask ourselves “What would Jesus do?”, we can think, “What’s worship got to do with what I am doing?” The answer? Everything! Carvalhaes’ point is to emphasize that as Christians seeking to live faithfully according to God’s will and way, we are to interpret life liturgically. “Liturgy” is another word used to define worship. “Liturgy” literally means the work of the people or the actions of the people or the worship of the people. So, to interpret life liturgically is to consider our work and actions together as God’s people and how they relate to God’s will and way for us. This has absolutely everything to do with our call to be the Church.

To unpack this more, I would like to suggest six things to consider and hold close. Like the quotes I shared last week, each is a sermon itself, but I am not going to spend that kind of time on each. We can consider these conclusion summaries pulled from a book with chapters unpacking how we are called to be the Church that WORSHIPS.

Number One: The words Carvalhaes uses to describe the act of worship is to **“love madly.”** More specifically, worship is the act of loving God madly. Think about that. To love may be one thing, but to “love madly” suggests a whole other level of commitment and attention and devotion. G.K. Chesterton challenges, “Let your religion be less of a theory and more of a love affair.” Unfortunately, we tend to consider worship only as an act or ritual within the traditions of religion, rather than understanding worship more as an act of love. What would it mean for us to be the Church that loves God madly?

Number Two: Like loving madly, worship can be best outfitted as a **“disposition of the heart.”** The focus of worship as liturgy leans in on embodiment and more fluid movements like kneeling to pray, singing, or coming to the table for communion. And all of these are great embodiments and movements, but they mean very little without our hearts being in the right

place. Diana Butler Bass challenges, “Christianity was never intended to be a system or a structure of belief in the modern sense; it originated as a disposition of the heart.” How can we, in our daily lives, foster a heart for God?

Number Three: The third suggestion in being the Church that worships is to consider **prayer** and the role it plays in our life. Abraham Joshua Heschel says, “Prayer is an invitation to God to intervene in our lives, to let God’s will prevail in our affairs; it is the opening of a window to God in our will, an effort to make God the Sovereign of our soul. We submit our interests to God’s concern and seek to be allied with what is ultimately right. Our approach to the holy is not an intrusion, but an answer.” To think of prayer in this way is to understand prayer as essential to our ability to worship God. We must be a praying people; praying with the world at heart; praying without ceasing; praying the Lord’s Prayer and believing it will and must be because it is God’s will that is to be done.

Number Four: The fourth suggestion in being the Church that worships is to consider **dance**. Just ask King David about dancing. He danced in the streets and with instruments. In looking more into dance as something deeper than bodily motion, I encountered what is known as the hermeneutics of the knees. It says, “The movements of our knees are intrinsically related to the ways we think, create, and live our worlds. Our knees, along with our bodies, learn what to accept and to reject, and are aware of control and subjection. Our knees know what touches are allowed and what movements they are supposed to do.”

The hermeneutics of the knees is an expression celebrated by African slaves in the United States: “Africans brought to North America were no doubt affirming their ancestral values when they sang a slave song that urged dancers to “gimme de kneebone bent.” To many western and central Africans, flexed joints represented life and energy, while straightened hips, elbows, and knees epitomized rigidity and death. The bent kneebone symbolized the ability to ‘get down.’” Carvalhaes reflects on this by saying, “With our kneebones bent and our hips telling the truth, we will be able to dance to God as we never did.” I would say while dancing we are able to worship God as we never did.

Number Five: The fifth suggestion for us to consider this morning is **baptism**. Against what Martin Luther King Jr. called “dry-as-dust religion” we need a wet religion, a very wet Christianity! Drenched in the waters of our baptism! Reminds me of the Geico commercial with Dick Vitale pouring water over his head.

Our baptism is not a one-time thing, but a lifetime thing. Our baptismal covenant is defined by God’s claim on our life as a child of God and God’s welcome and initiation into the family of

God; our renunciation of sin and evil (that which contradicts God) and our trust in God that through Jesus Christ we are cleansed of all unrighteousness and forgiven all our sins; a celebration of an old life being dead and a new life in Christ being alive. In baptism we are no longer defined by the things of this world, but the view of God on us as God's own perfectly imperfect. Something for us to remember is, "Our baptized lives show our allegiances and with whom we are siding." Our baptism is a mark like that of a tattoo, scar, sticker, leather biker jacket, service uniform, or team uniform. Being the Church that worships is to be drenched in clothes of righteousness and the fruits of the Spirit.

Within our baptism there are two acts. The first is memory. Through baptism, the grace of God continues to transform the individual- heart, body, soul- and fills this child of God with an expanded mission towards transformation and love and care for all humankind! The baptism of Jesus and our own baptisms are constant reminders of that which can bring us hope. *Our fight is over spiritual and historical amnesia, lack of historical ground that detaches our discipleship from the very core aspects of our baptism.* We must fight hard against that which begins to detach us from the vine or cause us to leave the flock or abandon the shepherd. Our baptism can serve as that reminder to our covenant commitment to God.

The second is revolt. Yes, revolt. In baptism we break with the submission of this world. In baptism we give our lives to God- not just a part that comes to 1215 VES Rd on Sunday- but our whole lives. And this new life gained in Christ is one where Paul writes, "There is no Jew or Greek, Slave or Free, Male or Female." In baptism, we are empowered to be radical enough and thorough enough, to revolt against all that is not God just like Jesus did.

Being the Church that worships is to be the Church that remembers, and revolts as often as when is needed.

In this thought, I was challenged by a quote from Carvalhaes this week. He writes, "Practically, the sense of freedom awarded by God and gained by us in our baptism means that not a single baptized person should go hungry, or go without housing, or education, or healthcare! And that is because the baptized individual is baptized into a local and global family. The enactment of baptism in our lives is the enactment of a new society and a new form of living.... Baptism is not only the performance of a religious rite, obedience to an ordinance, or the celebration of a sacrament.... To be baptized is to carry the cross daily and be with those whose lives are threatened to be extinguished daily." Think about that challenge and calling. Heavy, isn't it? But we do not have to bear the weight alone. We have each other and we have God.

Number Six: The sixth and final suggestion for us this morning in considering what it means to be the Church that worships is Pentecost. Not just the one liturgical Sunday a year we are asked to wear red and sing happy birthday to the church. That Sunday is always great and those are great traditions, but they miss the underlying power of Pentecost and how it changes the game in our understanding of what our call as the Church is to worship. Pentecost is essentially celebrating the movement of God through the Holy Spirit.

A preacher on Pentecost once started out, “Brothers and sisters tell me that the Spirit has never done anything in your life? Tell me that God has been silent throughout your life and has never spoken to you? Tell me you don’t believe that God is about to do something new to us and to our world?”

“We have seen God doing wondrous things in our lives. Even the fact that we are here today is a miracle!” One of us might say, “God has made me live up to this day.” Another might say, “I have come this far because the Holy Spirit has given me faith to believe and continue on.” Another might say, “God took me from a pile of dirt and made me shine.” Another might say, “My son was a prisoner to drugs and God gave him a new beginning.” Another might say, “I am not going to tell anyone what the Holy Spirit did to me, but I assure you this: The Spirit operated powerful miracles in my life.” Another might say, “I once was lost, very lost, but God came to find me anyway.” Another might say, “I felt completely invisible to society but now that I am a part of the church, I have seen God’s light shine on me.”

“Brothers and sisters it is not only that we have seen God do wondrous things, God is about to do something new in our lives and in the world once again!”

The hope of a church that WORSHIPS is that God is so good that more is yet to come. Praise be to God.

The same preacher who engaged the dialogue I just shared also said this, “Jesus has promised us the Kingdom of God and all we could do was build a church.” “At Pentecost, we receive a revelation that transforms us in such a way that there is no going back, ever. We are visited by that which we cannot name, but we can’t stop saying its name!” Put a slightly different way, “At Pentecost, our hearts are to be on high for the gift of the bountiful and gracious offerings of the fruits and all the food and everything we have that the earth, through God, continuously offers to us all.

Gathering at the table-

In love... in our hearts... through prayer and dancing... through baptism... through the power of the Holy Spirit... and now through this table... we gain perspective on how God has manifested God's glory and love deeply in the world's history and in our own history promising time after time that life is stronger than death. In love... in our hearts... through prayer and dancing... through baptism... through the power of the Holy Spirit... and now through this table... we are convicted to be the church that WORSHIPS God and God alone- with every fiber and breath of our being- individually and communally.