

FRUITFUL LIVING: PASSIONATE WORSHIP

Texts: Psalm 100
Luke 10:25-27

- I. Introduction—Today we're talking about worship, and as I've seen that video, so I'm realizing that even more than usual, I'm really preaching to the choir today. That most if not all of you could just as well be up here talking not just about worship, but what makes it a passionate experience for you. What an honor and a privilege it is for me to participate in worship every week with you all who value it so much. Thanks for your openness to share.
 - A. Have you ever had someone say to you "I can be a Christian and not go to church"?
 1. I have to say I hear it a little less now that I'm a pastor—maybe people are afraid to say it to me.
 2. I do believe that perception is rampant these days, when surveys say more and more people call themselves "spiritual" and even "Christian" and less and less regularly attend worship services.
 3. At Bible study a couple of weeks ago we were talking about this very topic. One person said that someone in a church they were a part of years ago stopped appearing on Sunday mornings, and when they were asked what was up, they said that they had gotten in the habit of being with God on Sunday morning on the deck of their house, watching the ducks on the river behind their house.
 - a) Now I'm sure this person who was telling the story responded in a nice way.
 - b) The darker side of me would have been tempted to ask them some questions, "Do those ducks greet you at the door? Do those ducks ask you how your week was? Do those ducks say they've been praying for you? Can you sing hymns with the ducks? Do you pray with the ducks?"
 4. Actually, my more polite and loving response is something like "Can you be a Christian and not go to church? Well, yes and no"
 - a) To use our "fruitfulness language", it's a little like being a tree and having some branches over there that bear fruit, and others over here that are completely barren. And the thing is, whenever Jesus tells parables about trees bearing fruit, he never says that some branches matter more than others.

- b) Typically, people who say that are ones who are very active in the community, who may bear wonderful fruit on the mission and service branches.
- c) But not to be in worship means that something very important is missing in their walk with God. They are missing perhaps the most important place and time in which God meets us on a regular basis.
- d) And more than that, they are missing the opportunity to meet and interact with God as a part of a community. Remember that Jesus said that wherever two or more are gathered, that is where God is. And I'm pretty sure he meant two or more people—that ducks may not count.

II. And actually now that I've read the chapter in the book about passionate worship, I'm thinking I should have some copies of the chapter with me all the time, and the next time someone says they can be a Christian and no go to church I can just hand it to them, because Bishop Schnase does a great job of explaining the importance of worship in the life of any disciple. Let me just sum up his four reasons why it's important. And again I realize I'm preaching to the choir today!

- A. First, he says that worship is the way we orient ourselves to God.
 - 1. Let's look at our chairs again for a minute.
 - a) I have them set up the way we typically are in worship—if I had a pew up here, it would show it even better.
 - b) These gray chairs are us—sitting alongside our friends and family or even people we don't know here on Sunday morning.
 - c) To suggest that we come here to orient ourselves to God, suggests a different layout. It reminds us that God is here too **(get orange chair)**.
 - d) And not only that, that no matter what is happening up here, God is the center of attention **(make circle with orange chair in the middle)**. God isn't just a part of the circle, like last week. When we worship, God is in the middle of the circle and all of our attention is on God.
 - 2. And this understanding is critical. As I often say, it can be hard to orient ourselves to God during the week sometimes amidst all the stress and busyness and everything else. If we don't come here to find and meet and interact with God, I think for a lot of us, that most important part of our faith journey can get a little hit-and-miss sometimes.

- B. Second, he says that worship fosters our relationship to the spiritual aspects of our lives.
1. What he means is that worship can equip us to deal with those critical questions of life that can't be answered simply with more knowledge or intellectual ability.
 2. We have all been faced with questions in life that aren't answerable in those ways.
 3. He says that in all facets of worship, from music to prayer to scripture to silence, we discover new spiritual insights that help us with those questions that go beyond our always-limited earthly knowledge.
 4. And he says that practicing worship is like learning a new language—if we fully engage ourselves here then we learn the language of deeper spirituality, which is a language that allows us to better deal with what life throws at us when we go out there.
- C. Third, worship is our way of putting ourselves in the most advantageous place for engaging the spirit.
1. Or in other words, he says that worship “represents a regular appointment with the sacred.”
 - a) Which got me thinking that maybe we should have the ushers hand out little appointment cards when you leave every week like you get at the doctor's office.
 - b) It would have next Sunday's date and 9:30/11:30 as your next appointment with God.
 - c) Because as I said before, most of us do meet God during the week, but it tends to be hit-and-miss a lot of the time.
 2. To take this doctor analogy a little further, this is the one place where it's all about meeting the Great Physician, where we can tell him of our aches and pains, and when we can learn of God's prescription of love and grace and forgiveness for us.
 3. The main difference between this place and the doctor's office is that instead of old magazines, we get to read the most timeless magazine of all!
- D. Worship “brings us back to ourselves”.
1. He uses words like being “grounded” and “connected” and “anchored”.
 2. When we gather here in worship, what we take away gives us an anchor that allows us to stay grounded when the winds start to blow as we go out into the world.

3. Another way to say it is that what we gain in worship here on Sunday morning helps get us through our lives—not just weekly but beyond.
4. He tells the story of the woman in the nursing home who even in the grips of Alzheimer's, still remembered the words of "Amazing Grace".
 - a) In that story I remembered Annette's grandma, who was exactly the same and then some—at the end of her life, she didn't know anyone, but could sing not just "Amazing Grace" but a good portion of the hymnal. And not just the first verses of all those hymns!
 - b) And I always remembered thinking, here is someone who is grounded by a life of worship in ways that I can only hope to be some day.
5. And this grounding can be much smaller in scope—as one who leads worship, it's always been my goal that if you can remember just one thing that you heard or saw or tasted or smelled or touched before, during, or after the service that helps you through the week then God has been present for you!
6. To be grounded by what we've experienced in worship doesn't mean it's necessarily totally and completely life-changing every week. No one who plans or leads worship wants that kind of pressure!

III. So if that is what makes worship important, what makes it passionate? What takes our experience and participation in worship to the next level? As I read that part of the chapter, I realized it could be summed up with three words:

A. Passionate worship is authentic

1. By authentic, he means real—by real he means that it's about God and not us, that we aren't here to be entertained, that it's not about gimmicks that people focus on rather than what God is trying to tell us.
2. Another Fred Craddock story about what authenticity isn't like--
3. I've been to some of those mega-churches with the Hollywood production values and scores of professional musicians and all the rest, and seen some great and meaningful services. Other times you have to wonder if they've crossed the line into making me focus on the medium at the expense of the message.

4. Bishop Schnase says simply that authentic worship comes from the heart rather than going through the motions. And I think that speaks to all of us, whether you're up here or down there.

B. Passionate worship is Adventurous

1. By adventurous, he means that it gets us out of our comfort zones once in a while.
2. If it all gets too familiar and comfortable, music-wise, liturgy-wise, prayer-wise, order-wise, sermon-wise, and we get sort of settled-in and set in our ways, then it can be hard to grow more fruitful because we can kind of get stuck in a rut.

C. Passionate worship is Active.

1. I had a worship professor (who was a staid, traditional, sort of stuffy Episcopalian) who liked to say that worship was his favorite full-participation sport.
2. I'm not sure I'm ready to call what we do here on Sunday morning a sport, but I get what he was saying. We go to football games or basketball games and we know ahead of time who the players are and who is supposed to win. We know the fight songs and we sing along. We cheer along with the cheerleaders—Go Green Go White.
3. We are into it, from the opening kick-off to the final whistle.
4. Are we that into worship? Here's what Bishop Schnase says in part: "People who practice Passionate Worship...enter worship with their hearts and minds prepared. They read the scriptures in advance. They pray for the pastor, the church staff, the musicians, and all who lead worship. They take notes when something strikes them so they can mull it over in private...(they) let music into their souls. They lift their voices in praise to God. They let themselves sing. People who love worship offer their services to enhance the experience for others. They create a sense of warmth and welcome for others. They influence an atmosphere of expectation. They carry their daily lives with them into prayer and worship, and carry worship and prayer with them into their daily lives...They let God reach and change them through worship..." In other words, they participate fully in worship at different levels.

D. Passionate worship is authentic, adventurous, and active.

IV. Conclusion

- A. And over and above that, just like we said about radical hospitality, in the end it's all about love.

- B. In the words of the book—We love worship because we love God.
We worship in order to receive God’s love and to love God in return.
- C. In the words of Jesus when he was asked what the greatest commandment was, said, “That you love the Lord your God with all of your passion and your prayer.”
- D. We have gathered here today to live out that commandment—we gather here today and every time in worship in order to show our love for God with all of our passion and our prayer.
- E. And we gather because God first loved us and still shows his love for us in what is sung, and what is seen , and what is heard, and what is spoken, and what is felt as we gather as a community that is all about God’s love for us, and our love for God, and our love for each other.
- F. Thanks be to God for the gift of worship and for the opportunity we have to participate with passion.