

March 5 – Encountering God Through Worship

Psalm 84:1-4

1 Chronicles 16:23-31

Praise band? Organ? The old hymns? Praise choruses only? We have been fighting the worship wars for more than 30 years now. Gaither hymns were the “contemporary music” when they were first sung; they rocked the music boat for many churches. Now we either don’t realize we are singing a hymn written by Bill and Gloria Gaither or we ask, “Who are the Gaithers?”

And the worship wars haven’t been limited to what kind of music we sing and what kind of instruments we use. Do we raise our hands during worship? Do we say, “Amen” or “Praise the Lord” OUT LOUD during the worship service? Do we have a pulpit? How much technology is expected? How much is too much?

Every Sunday we come to worship.....And we need to pause and remember why we come to worship. We come because

Worship is commanded by God We are to be passionate about worshipping God!

When we read Old Testament scripture, we come to see that worship is a way of living.

Genesis 22:5 bow down, prostrate oneself

Exodus 8:1 Let my people go, so that they may worship me

Exodus 20 – The Ten Commandments begin telling us to love God, love only God

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 – continues this instruction:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, might

Bind these words to your foreheads, put them on the doorposts of your home”

Worship defined God’s people as they became a people and a nation

Psalms – praise the Lord

Psalm 95:6 Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker

Psalm 150:1-6 Praise the Lord! Praise God in his Sanctuary

1

Isaiah 45:23, quoted in Romans 14:11 As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise (thanks) to God

Isaiah 45:23 is adapted in Philippians 2:10-11 where Paul writes, “so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Worship of God pervades the Old Testament. The Hebrews were in relationship with YHWH, I AM, the Lord. Worship was the expression of their gratitude to God, of their love of God. When they turned to worshipping other gods, breaking the relationship with the one true God, they suffered greatly.

That we are to worship God continues throughout the New Testament:

Matthew 2:11 In this verse “worship” actually means “kiss the hand towards the one in token of reverence.” It is used to describe the Magi worshipping the baby Jesus

Luke 4:8 – When tempted by Satan in the wilderness, Jesus quotes scripture, “Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only” This account is also found in Matthew 4:8-10

John tells us what kind of worship we are to offer to God:

John 4:23 “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

We come to worship each Sunday because worship is commanded by God. And we make an intentional decision to come on Sunday morning for the purpose of worship because we are passionate about God!

As we read in 1 Chronicles 16:23-31:

We are to declare the glory of God and His marvelous works to all people

The Lord is great and greatly to be praised!

The Lord made the heavens

We worship God because God is worthy of praise, because of his marvelous works, because of his glory

2

We are to worship the Lord: bring tribute and enter before Him, bow down to the Lord majestic in holiness.

As God's people, we are to worship God. I was listening to an interview with the producer of Chef's Table, a television series focusing on one chef each program. The producer commented that to be a chef, a great chef, a person has to be obsessed. Author Malcolm Gladwell once wrote that to be great at something, a person must spend 10,000 hours practicing. If we only worship when we come on Sunday, even if we come every Sunday of each year, we would have to attend Sunday worship for 192 years to reach the level of practicing 10,000 hours. We are to be obsessed about worshiping God, to be passionate in our worship.

Well, why do we have to come to church to worship? Can't we just worship God by ourselves? Out in nature? Or can't we worship at home as we watch one of the many televised services?

Yes, we can worship God by ourselves, out in nature. For worship is a way of living, just as the Hebrews were commanded in the Old Testament.

The writer of Hebrews stresses that worship is continual. Hebrews 13:15 "Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name"

And we also are to come together as God's people, as the Body of Christ, to worship. That is what we do on Sunday mornings. In the New Testament, Paul reminds us to meet together for worship.

In Ephesians 5:19, we read we are to address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart Paul says something very similar in Colossians 3:16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

Paul was telling the believers in Ephesus and Colossae that they were to gather together in worship: singing praises, teaching and admonishing one another.

Again from Hebrews, this time from chapter 10, verse 25, we read, "Do not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

We are to gather on Sunday morning for worship. We are to gather as God's people, the Body of Christ, in this place. When we gather for worship each Sunday, what are we expecting? Do we expect to meet God in this place? To enter into the presence of the Almighty?

If we are to enter into the presence of the Most High God, we must choose to redirect our focus.

We choose to turn away from earthly concerns for this time.

We choose to turn from the activity of the morning before we arrived. We choose to turn away from what we're planning to do after church today

We choose to turn away from earthly concerns to focus on God for this time.

We come expecting to encounter our Creator, our Savior, God's Holy Spirit in this place during this time.

We come expecting to experience how God's Spirit is moving this morning, to listen for what God's Spirit has to tell each of us, to guide us this morning and prepare us for the week to come.

So, if we come expecting to encounter God, can we be observers, spectators only? Is Sunday morning worship just a time when we come, sit in our pew, listen to the prayers, sing some hymns, listen to the sermon and then leave? Is worship essentially a performance we watch? OR

If we come expecting to encounter God, does that mean we MUST be, WE have to be participants, the "actors" on stage, in this activity of worship?!

It is so easy to fall into a routine when we worship: we have an order of worship that we follow almost every Sunday. And yet we need to avoid routine worship. We need to avoid falling into a comfort zone in which worship is predictable it becomes rote, something we can do without thinking about what we're doing.

How many of you drive the same route to church every Sunday? If you do, you know exactly where the traffic lights and stop signs are. You know where to turn, without really pausing to remember where to turn. You have driven the same route so often, you don't have to give driving your full attention. The same thing happens when we worship in exactly the same way each and every Sunday. It becomes comfortable, predictable. Some of us prefer this! But there is a danger in being too comfortable, too predictable. Just as driving the same route to church each time no longer demands our being alert, being attentive, so does worship that has become predictable, routine. We don't have to pay attention and focus on what we're doing.

Recently we began receiving the offering after the message. That, I'm guessing, was unsettling to some. And yet, the offering is one way we have of responding to God with gratitude. It is one way of saying, "Yes, I've been brought back into God's presence this morning and I want to give back to God as I am preparing to leave."

This morning we used a different format for the pastoral prayer. That, I'm guessing, was unsettling to some. And yet, a bidding prayer gives each of us the opportunity to pray for the person or concern identified—each of us praying, not just the pastor.

The worship wars—what kind of music should we sing: hymns, praise choruses?; is it ok for people to lift their hands during prayer or while singing?; is it ok for people to say "Praise God" or something similar, out loud during the service? Whatever the source of disagreement as to how we worship, ultimately the disagreement is about what makes us, what makes ME

comfortable. What I like, and only rarely about what God wants in our worship.

What does God want from us in our worship? God through Christ actively seeks relationship with us through our acts of worship. Worship must come from the heart. That means each Sunday, when we worship, we need to refocus our thoughts and our hearts on our Lord.

When we gather for worship on Sunday morning, what are we expecting? Can we say each Sunday at 10:25, "I can't wait to experience what God has in store for me, for us, today as we sing praises, offer our gratitude, engage in God's word. I can't wait to experience God in worship today?"

Through worship, God can transform our lives, heal our wounded souls, renew hope, mold our decisions to fit God's teachings, persuade us to work for change, inspire us to be compassionate and bind us together as God's people. Through worship, our minds, our hearts and our behavior can be shaped according to God's commandments.

When we gather for worship on Sunday morning, what do we bring, what do we expect?

The title of this message is Passionately Worshiping God. What is passionate worship?

I'm suggesting passionate worship includes:

Focusing on God, and God alone, during worship

Psalm 84:2a – My soul longs for the courts of the Lord

Participating actively in the worship service

Singing, praying, listening, speaking, sharing

Psalm 84:2b my heart and my flesh sing for joy, shout for joy, to the living God

Eagerly offering the very best we have

Honoring God with excellence throughout the service

Striving to connect ourselves and others to God

One author reminds us, “Worship is the most likely point of first contact the unchurched have with a congregation....in some churches, many visitors do not find genuine warmth, a premium on excellence, or a message presented in a form that engages them”

We can extend this statement to include all visitors, whether seeking a place to worship or seeking to “find God.”

Through the five practices of fruitful congregations, we put God first in all we do (Love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength) and we seek to connect others with God (make disciples, baptizing and teaching all Jesus commanded).

We give God the first portion of our time, talent and treasure/money – that’s Extravagant Generosity

We strive to deepen our own connection with God, we strive to better understand what God is calling us to do – that’s Intentional Faith Development

We welcome, receive, accept the stranger into our midst— that’s Radical Hospitality

We accept that when we serve God we may be uncomfortable, our service may cost us and that we cannot be complacent in God’s work—that’s Risk-taking Missions and Service

We intentionally choose to worship God as an active participant in the Body of Christ. We offer the very best we have as we worship. That’s Passionately Worshiping God.

It isn’t about one particular kind of music; it isn’t about whether we raise our hands in worship, wear choir robes or even have a choir. It isn’t about technology. It isn’t about the length of the service. It’s about allowing God’s Spirit to change us through worship, passionate worship, We can leave renewed and reconnected for another week. It’s about allowing God’s Spirit, through our passionate worship, to breathe life into us as the community of Christ’s followers.

God wants our hearts; God wants us to be the people of God. 7