

Uncomfortable Church: Uncomfortable Worship

Psalm 95:1-7

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Rev. Dr. Patrick Schultz

Today we come back to this sermon series Uncomfortable, by looking at Uncomfortable Worship.

In doing so, I'm going to ask three questions:

How do we worship God?

What does it mean to worship God?

Why do we worship God?

The first time the word *worship* shows up in our Bible is when God is giving Moses the 2nd set of tablets for the 10 Commandments. We know the first were destroyed because the Israelites were worshipping a Golden Calf while Moses was gone.

And God tells the Israelites (*you shall worship no other god*)

But the first form of worship we read about in the Bible is, '*giving to God.*'

Cain gave offerings of the fruits from his plantings.

Able gave the first born of his flocks.

From that time on offerings made to God constituted early worship:

the giving of their first – from the fields, from livestock,

and even the first-born child.

Not that children were sacrificed – rather dedicated to God;

to be used by God;

according to God's will.

Such as when Hagar, driven out of her home by Sarah, was on the verge of dying of thirst when God appeared and showed her a well of water. She dedicated her son, Ismael to God and God was with the boy as he grew up having said to Hagar that he will make a great nation of him.

Later, the Samaritan nation built a temple on the mountain ~ a temple they said Moses designed. And they proclaimed the temple as a place where the nation should worship.

And the forms of worship evolved with the people and included talking with or walking with God. At this point formal prayer had not yet developed. So, the people would talk to God. Or cry out to God when they needed help.

Like Israel groaning in their slavery to Egypt; and crying out to God. God heard their groaning and saw the plight of the people. And responded by sending Moses to lead them out of slavery.

Offerings, crying out, 10 commandments, building an altar, dedicating children to serve God are tangible ~ actionary forms of worship.

And as David sang in the Psalm of Thanksgiving:

“Sing to the Lord, all the earth. Tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all peoples. For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised.”

For God is Good. All the Time
All the Time. God is Good.

These early forms of worship are still part of our worship today. Today we follow the 10 Commandments: it is in many ways the bedrock of our faith.

We may not follow all 10; after all we do tend to lift up idols.

Our favorite sports team; money; power; prestige; certain famous people... they begin to take precedence in our lives. We don't always honor our moms or dads. We might tell stories of our neighbors, co-workers, church family or family-family.

But, can we rest easy in knowing we haven't committed murder? Have not stolen or committed adultery? That's a great start, but we can't rest. Our goal is not to pick and choose which 10 to follow.

After all, these are not called, “*The Ten Suggestions*”

Our congregational prayer is a form of crying out for the easing of pain, improved health, a cessation to violence or racism or war, poverty, abuse and neglect.

We give of our offerings. We give here at church; we support ministry in the community; we adopt a child through Children-International. We take on the task of raising funds for others in need: Crop Walk; OCWM, Neighbors-In-Need; Children's Hospital; SCIO...

We pray when our child is born that he or she will be dedicated to God and for God's purpose. Whatever purpose that might be. We build churches and places of worship. And we strive to make ourselves temples to God. By aligning our head, heart and body in health and dedication to serve the Lord.

We pray for others; we pray for God's presence in our lives; we pray for help in making a decision. And we talk to God –

Here's how my day is going God;

God this awesome opportunity has been given to me – do you want me to take it?

Oh God... this happened to me today – let me tell you all about it.

Talking to God deepens our relationship with him. It is an important way for us to worship!

We tell others about God. We tell the stories of God at work in our lives. We tell how knowing God has made a difference. We share God so that others may come to know God as we do. This is how we worship God.

Whether our church is UCC or Lutheran, Presbyterian or Methodist:

Our order of worship,

our style of worship music,

how often we serve communion,

whether the congregation dresses up or comes as is...

one is not better than the other.

Because we all worship the same God.

Yet, what does it mean to worship God?

It means among other things that worship originates from within, from the heart, it is sincere and motivated by our love of God and in gratitude for all the God has done and all that God is.

Worship isn't mechanical; it doesn't come from some formula; it's not strict in its structure: do this, then this, then this in just this way does not mean worship in and of itself.

But, this also doesn't disclude rituals or liturgy. What it means is that whatever posture we are taking, whatever liturgy is being read, said, or prayed is to be heartfelt.

It is the expression of our commitment, faith, love, and zeal to God.

It is the infusion and inclusion of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul told the Philippians that Christians, "worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Jesus Christ"

It's the Spirit that awakens us and stirs us to celebrate, rejoice and give thanks.

It's the Spirit that opens our eyes to see and cherish all that God is for us in Christ.

It is honoring God: heart, soul and mind. True worship engages and inflames our emotions; our passions; our affection to God. It calls us into a deeper relationship with God and through that – a deeper, more meaningful relationship with one another.

Worship shapes us, profoundly. It teaches what we believe. It molds our habits. It directs us to the Kingdom of God – in heaven and on earth.

The rhythms of worship can carry us from one time of worship to the next. And yes, that rhythm is disrupted or begins to dissipate if we neglect worship.

This is an answer all by itself to the question, why do we worship God? But there is more:

First, we understand that worship is not primarily for us – any benefit we receive is incidental. Worship is first and foremost a selfless act of love toward God. The writer of Psalms 95 said: *“Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker. For he is our God and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.”*

We bow and kneel and prostrate ourselves to God. Putting God above all things. From this we enjoy the emotion and sensation of worshiping. It makes us feel good ~ but that is not our main reason for worshipping.

We worship because we have an awesome God.

We worship because God calls us to and it pleases him.

We worship as a reflection of our love for and devotion to God.

The vitality of a church’s worship depends on the congregation giving up their independent freedoms and opinionated preferences to the larger community and ultimately to the Lord.

Whether our worship is in-person; in the parking lot; or virtually on YouTube; it’s still worship and our intent of worship does not change who the worship is for.

We worship God.

We do so by loving and serving each other in the messiness of worship.

In this way, through all the how, what, & why

the Kingdom of God on earth begins to establish itself ~ and grow. And we help to make that happen. Our God is an awesome God. Amen?