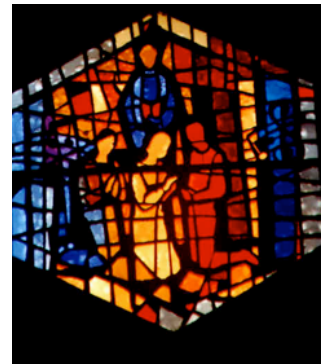




Sermon, October 11, 2020
Rev. Dr. Craig S. Pesti-Strobel
Junction City United Methodist Church

Sermon Series: Jesus's Way of Ways
The Way of Devotional Practice and Worship



Scripture: (Psalm 150) Arnie and Elaine Anderson

Praise the Lord!

Praise God in his sanctuary;

praise him in his mighty firmament!^[a]

² Praise him for his mighty deeds;

praise him according to his surpassing greatness!

³ Praise him with trumpet sound;

praise him with lute and harp!

⁴ Praise him with tambourine and dance;

praise him with strings and pipe!

⁵ Praise him with clanging cymbals;

praise him with loud clashing cymbals!

⁶ Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord!

Second Reading (Isaiah 6:1-7)

⁶ In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. ² Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. ³ And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.”

⁴ The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. ⁵ And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”

⁶ Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷ The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.”

It is obvious from the Gospels that Jesus observed the various Jewish festivals and religious rituals. There are numerous references in the New Testament to his participation in synagogue services. In addition, he spent much time alone in prayer and communion with God. All of these are acts of devotion and worship.

“Worship” derives from the Old English word *weorth*, which meant what its modern form, “worth” denotes: that which renders something valuable and desirable. The worship of God recognizes that God is the source of all that is valuable and desirable, and that communion and fellowship with God is to be desired above all other things. This is expressed eloquently in a hymn of praise in the Book of Revelation: “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being” (Revelation 4:11). This pithy little hymn describes the basis for worship of God (who creates and grants being to all things), as well as the content of worship (offering to God honor and glory and power).

Humans naturally tend to find value and worth in things, and to seek after that which they value. It is a basic driving force of human behavior. Acts of devotion and worship help to direct this natural tendency toward God and toward ultimate concerns. One way we demonstrate that something is of value to us is by the time that we devote to it, especially time that is our own to give, not time required to make a living or put food on the table. For instance, how much time do you spend each week watching or playing sports? How much time hiking in the woods or fishing? How much

time working on projects? The time that you spend, that is your “free time” to use as you wish, is a direct indicator of the value you place on the thing you are doing.

Devoting time in the worship of God is a formal declaration of the high value we place in the life that has been made possible for us by the grace, mercy and love of God. Worship is the acknowledgement of our complete and utter dependence upon God for everything. It is not always easy to admit our dependence upon others for our well-being, but it is the most well-established fact of life: we are fully dependent upon forces outside of ourselves for our well-being, in fact for our being at all.

One of the hugest myths of our time is the fantasy of the “self-made man.” There is no such thing. A professor in the seminary I attended, Dr. Doug Adams, used to remind us of this fact graphically. He would say, “Do you know how you can tell a self-made man? He has no belly button!” There right in front of us, as an ever-present reminder of our dependence upon others for our well-being sits our belly button. Any time we feel too certain of our self-sufficiency and individual cleverness, we need only to pat our belly to remind ourselves that we are a product of forces and laws and creatures and people far beyond our reckoning and even our recognizing. Worship is the vehicle whereby we acknowledge our dependence upon these forces and creatures and people by acknowledging the One responsible for their being in the first place.

Worship helps bolster the spiritual life by reminding us and reinforcing within us the knowledge that we are part of something vastly grander and more profound than our own bounded and limited perspective.

When I was in seminary, I lived in an apartment that was set on a hill overlooking the San Francisco Bay. I would often go up on the roof and look out over the city and across the bay to the Golden Gate Bridge. I could see cars driving on the bridges and boats making their way across the water. Whatever problem I had that seemed so overwhelming and pressing faded in intensity and diminished in size as I gazed out upon the

larger world around me. The problems didn't disappear, but the very exercise of gazing out onto a larger landscape helped me to realize that I was indeed part of something beyond my narrow point of view, and this helped me to understand that no problem was insurmountable, nor was it interminable.

Worship is just this sort of gazing out upon a larger landscape – a landscape that is universal in scale and unlimited in its timeframe. Nothing in human experience lasts forever, and this realization is a powerful antidote to despair and anxiety. Worship expands our horizons, lifts our spirits, and elevates our values.

The one thing in life we have absolute control over is how we act in the world – how we relate and react to others. The choices we make day to day about how we respond to those around us - what we say, how we treat people, how we spend our time, where we go, what we do - these are in our power of choice. It has been aptly said, "What we are is God's gift to us, what we do with ourselves is our gift to God."

This act of acknowledging in worship our dependency places us firmly in the midst of the complex network of relationships that make life possible. The remaining spiritual practices that follow are the means whereby we contribute to the well-being of others, and thereby become the channels and instruments of God's grace in the world.

So this week, take time every day, perhaps once in the morning and once at the end of your day, to sit or stand quietly and consider the vast world and universe around you. Look at the starry sky at night, and marvel at the dew on the grass and listen to the birds in the morning. Think of how intricately and wonderfully made this creation is. Close your eyes, and join in the song of the heavenly host: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"