

Worship 101

Pastor Rich Knight
Trinitarian Congregational Church
Sept. 9, 2012
Psalm 100

On the 2nd Sunday of October I'm going to begin a series of sermons entitled, "Bridges to the Great Religions of the World." I'll give brief introductory teachings on the other religions and then talk about what we have in common with them, even what we can learn from the faith of others. I've always wanted to do such a series, but what's held me back is there's so much to teach about our faith. It's hard to think about talking about other religions when I haven't told you about the Babylonian Captivity or Liberation Theology or the Imprecatory Psalms or St. Paul's 3 Missionary Journeys. But I'm covering a lot of those type of things in the Christian Literacy Project; so I gave myself permission to teach about other religions. But first, I'm going to review some of the essentials of our faith - call it, "Christianity 101." Today is Worship 101. To help us think about worship let's take a look at Psalm 100.

Psalm 100

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise.

Give thanks to him, bless his name.

For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

Worship 101. We begin here because Worship is the center of the church's life. Worship is central to who we are. Worship is the vital organ of the Body of Christ. I've never known an alive, dynamic, Spirit-filled church that didn't highly value worship and see it as the first priority of the church. We are most the church when we are in worship. Because in worship we celebrate God's love, we respond in thankfulness for God's love and we seek to make that love more and more a reality in our lives by being here.

Everything we do flows out of worship.

- we love others because we experience a God of love when we worship.
- we seek to make the world more just and fair for all, because the God we encounter in worship is just, kind and compassionate to all.
- we seek to love our neighbor and each other because the God we meet in worship fills us with divine love and compels to love others.

The church's life flows out of its worship.

Years ago in my first church I finished the worship service and walked downstairs to shake hands. As I went down the stairs I saw one of our members sprucing up the bulletin board at the bottom of the steps. I said hi. She said, "I've been meaning to do this ever since you asked, but I just haven't had time. So I did it during church." I honestly didn't know how to respond. So I did what I usually do when I don't know what to say, I said nothing. I hoped I thanked her but I don't remember. But what I wanted to say was - "Worship is more important than bulletin boards!" It's more important than anything - for us as a church and for us as individuals. Worship is the most important thing we do. Everything else flows out from it.

There's a couple of things I'd like us to remember about worship.

1 - The first is just that - **Worship is the most important thing we do as a church.** We get our spiritual vitality from worship.

2 - Another is, **You don't have to be a good singer to worship.** It says, "*Make a Joyful Noise.*"

3 - Worship helps us fulfill the first and greatest commandment - "To love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength."

St. Augustine once wrote: *True whole prayer is nothing but love.*
Well, True whole worship is nothing but love.

4 - Worship is part of our destiny.

When our Scriptures give us glimpses of heaven we see that one of the primary activities there seems to be worship. Years ago I read an interesting article by the Christian singer, Keith Green. It was entitled, "Will You be Bored in Heaven" Green's point was, we'd better learn to worship now because we're going to be doing it for a long, long time.

5 - Worship is a two-way street.. It's two-way communication between you and God.

Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher & theologian pointed out that we often misunderstand the worship experience. We think the action is between the pew and the pulpit. But that's not where the heart of the action is.

At my previous church someone told me they were walking into the church one Sunday and the person they were walking with, chatting with, said, "I hope Rich is inspirational today." The person who told me this story then replied, "That's not the point. We're not walking in there for Rich. We're walking in there for God." And that's the point. We come here to meet with God.

Kierkegaard said we often view worship like an audience viewing a performance - with the clergy and musicians as the performers and you as the audience. But Kierkegaard said the real audience is God. And the clergy are simply prompters, helping you remember your lines, guiding you as to what to say next, as we all come before God. There's an audience of one, and that's God.

I like to think of worship as your weekly "Date Night" with God. - even though it's Sunday morning. You know the concept, of course. Couples have their Date Nights to reconnect, to keep the flame alive, to rekindle their friendship and their romance. One couple told me the first half of their dinner consists of catching up - "Did I tell you we're invited to a picnic on Sat. in Ohio?" "Did I tell you that my mother's coming to visit for a month?" And then once they've caught up and sometimes cleared up some misunderstanding, then they really can reconnect. We come here to reconnect with God. That's what's supposed to be happening in all our hearts. This is God's time, God's morning, God's Day. "Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy."

That's why when someone tells me to make sure the service doesn't go over an hour (and I seldom hear that and when I do the person is almost always joking . . . but when I do hear it) I want to say something like, "If you were out for your date night and your spouse kept looking at their watch and saying, 'When's this gonna be over?' - would that be a good sign of relational closeness and commitment? Or if your spouse said, "Honey, we've been here an hour. I know you're not finished with your food, but we have to go. I've put in my time."

This is our time with God. It's your weekly date with your Beloved. There's music to set the mood. There's the poetry of scripture to inspire you. And there's even a meal to further the intimacy. Because you are God's beloved.

I'll close with this. My sons and I spent the week before Labor Day in Acadia National Park, one of the most beautiful spots on earth. We were standing on Sand Beach on an absolutely stunning day and I overheard a woman say, as she lifted her arms to the air, "I want to take this all in so I never forget it."

Worship is where we come to gaze upon the stunning glory of God, and, as much as we can we seek to take more and more of God into our lives so we never forget - so we never forget God's love, God's hand upon our lives.

So

Make a joyful noise to the Lord.

Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.

For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

All of this we celebrate and respond to in worship.

Worship is the center of the Church's life.

May we never forget that.

Amen.