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**“We’re Better Together: Worshiping”**  
Lev. 23:3; 2 Cor. 8:1-4, 7; John 4:21-24

As I prepared for this last installment of “As the Church World Turns”... which, as you’re aware by now, deals with the subject of **worship**... I came across the following quote from that ‘patriarch’ of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Christendom, Rev. Billy Graham:

*“The purpose of this Christian society called the “Church” is, first:  
to **glorify God** by our **worship**. We do not go to church to just hear a sermon.  
We go to church to worship God.”*

Let me first say that despite what you just heard, YES, we ARE going to have a sermon today. (Sorry, George). What I will wholeheartedly agree on, however, is that the importance of our time of corporate worship is so much MORE than the day’s individual message. NOT to say that the Proclamation of the Word isn’t important! I would agree with an analogy I recall hearing in Seminary that likens our Sabbath day worship to an old-fashioned wagon wheel: the Reading and exposition of the *Written Word*, the Scriptures... which point us to the *Incarnate Word*, Jesus... is the central ‘hub’ around which that whole wheel revolves. BUT... without all of the other elements of worship, that ‘wheel’ isn’t going anywhere. It’s not just about what happens at the ‘core’ ... but how it ‘goes out’ from there.

So, as we consider the final... and perhaps, the most fundamental... element of what makes us ‘better together’ as ‘the Church,’ let us consider Rev. Graham’s #1 purpose of the church: to glorify God by our worship. Worship... which, to borrow from the children’s rhyme, are the ‘wheels of the church bus which go round, round, round.’ ...Without which we go nowhere....

I would focus your attention back to those words I recited at the beginning of the service... that definition of ‘**Worship**’ that came from the Book of Order... a book so intimidating, so ‘scary’ to some that it is might be referred to by the ‘acrostic’ formed by the 3 first letters: ‘B-O-O.’ Or, ‘**Boo!**’ There is, of course, nothing ‘scary’ about what it says about **worship**. Indeed, I would encourage you to read over the beginning of that chapter to be inspired, illuminated by the HS as to the importance of our worship. The first part of that intro I

lift up for you is this: *“In worship the people of God **acknowledge God present in the world and in their lives.**”* (Book of Order, W-1.1001)

So how are you and I, the people of God, called to go about ‘acknowledging God present in the world, and in our lives?’ Are we supposed to wear a big, bold black-and-white t-shirt that says, **“Got God?”** Should we put up a big sign out front of the building that says *‘God’s Here... Why aren’t YOU?!’* Maybe just a *little* over the top?

No, one of the most ‘fun-and-mental’ ways you can ‘acknowledge God’s presence,’ both in your life and in the world, is found in that Leviticus passage: ***“There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a day of sabbath rest, a day of sacred assembly.”*** (Lev. 23:3)

Now, I know that in our ‘hurried society,’ our weekday employment more-and-more infringes on our weekend. BELIEVE ME, I KNOW! If there is ANY occasion in which that one finger I’m pointing at you has *three* pointing back at me, it would be this issue of taking a ‘sabbath rest.’ More and more I find myself laboring on Friday morning, Saturday am and pm, Sunday afternoon. I really struggle with finding time to truly ‘sabbath’... for me, and for Barrie.

Sooo, I’ll tell you what. Let’s pray for each other. Let’s covenant that we will ALL work more diligently at ‘keeping the Sabbath holy.’ Whether here at our homes, or when on the road... ***“wherever you live.”*** Even if only for a night or two. For no matter where you are, there is nothing that will ‘acknowledge’ any clearer the presence of God’ in your life, and in the world, than for people seeing you take time for ‘sabbath’... both to **rest**, and just as importantly, to **worship**.

Another vital aspect of our spiritual life of worship is found in the next sentence of that ‘BoO’ quote: *“As they **respond** to God’s claim and redemptive action in Jesus Christ... the faithful **offer themselves to God.**”* That once we’ve committed to BEING here on the Sabbath, ‘joyfully ascribing all praise and honor, glory and power’ to God, THEN WHAT? After hearing God speak to you through the proclamation of the Word, how do you **respond?** How are you, ‘the faithful,’ **‘offering yourself to God?’**

The Apostle Paul sure wasn’t shy about telling his fellow ‘church members’ just how they were called to ‘respond’... with the very offering of themselves. In this 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the

church in Corinth, Paul is actually BRAGGING about the church's response. As you may recall, the great Apostle wrote that...

***"We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches... for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints..." (2 Corinthians 8:1-4)***

Paul isn't just speaking to those 1<sup>st</sup> C. believers around the Mediterranean Sea... but to 21<sup>st</sup> C. believers around 'the Lake of Charles.' He's speaking to FPC! As a congregation... and as individual believers... I know that you too have gone through times of '***severe ordeals of affliction.***' But that through it all, by the grace of God, you have yet been able to experience "***abundant joy.***" And that despite the '***poverty***' we are experiencing in ongoing deficit budgets, you can yet '***overflow in a wealth of generosity.***' That as we seek to move into an exciting, but at the same time uncertain, future, it will depend in no small part to your willingness to '***give according to your means... and even beyond your means.***' WHY? Well, in Paul's words, "***for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints.***" Like the church in Corinth, we are called to "***excel in the grace of giving.***"

So, just what does this issue of the 'giving' of ourselves have to do with 'worship'? (besides that the expression of that giving is most associated with the worship service). Well, because our call to **worship** is inextricably connected with our **response** TO that call... the 'grace of **giving**' of time, talents, and treasures. Giving not just in here, but out there...

Donald K. McKim, a highly-regarded Presbyterian theologian, and Sr. editor at Westminster John Knox Press, describes what one might entitle Our 'Christian Life Cycle': "In **worship** we experience the rhythm of God's **grace** as it is met by our **gratitude**, which leads us to ministries of **service**. Our service, in turn, brings us back to **worship.**" Where, once again, we are moved by God's **grace** to respond in **gratitude**, and **service**.

Let me add that there has been, in the current academic vernacular, a 'paradigm shift' in many of the younger generations. They won't necessarily jump on board this 'rhythm of God's grace' in **worship**. But rather, become engaged in 'ministries of **service**,' which can THEN lead

them to join in worship. As they see God at work in our lives ‘out there,’ they can... by the power of the Spirit, AND our invitation... be intrigued enough by our living out of the Christian faith to come see God at work in our lives ‘in here.’

And finally, in Christian worship, ***“believers are transformed and renewed... and are equipped for God’s service in the world.”*** Boy, THAT sounds good! ‘Transformation.’ ‘Renewal.’ Being ‘equipped for God’s service.’ Where can I get some of this ‘high octane fuel’ for my broken-down gas guzzler? Where do I go to show myself as a faithful follower of Christ, one who seeks His transformational, renewing, equipping power?

Is it HERE? 2525 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave.? Is it our next location... be it another temporary ‘tent in the wilderness,’ or our new outpost in the ‘Mission/MorganField?’ Or is it at LA Presbyterian Pilgrimage, or at a conference at Mo-Ranch or Montreat, or is it at Grand Coteau or Manresa silent retreat?

When Jesus had his heart-to-heart discussion with the Samaritan woman at the well... from which today’s gospel passage comes... she asked him where she should go to best worship God – the mountainside outdoor chapel, or the most holy Temple in Jerusalem. To which he replied: ***“...believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ... the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these...”***

***“...true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.”*** Have you heard this statement before? ‘True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth.’ What do you think Jesus means here? Well, the ‘spirit’ part probably has to do with the 3<sup>rd</sup> person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit. The one who helps us to understand Scripture, who is our Advocate, our Counselor, that small still voice that comforts and guides us. BUT, I think that there is also a ‘spirit’ of worship that is important. One that pushes us to actually LEARN and SING some of those unfamiliar songs the pastor forces on you. A ‘spirit’ that prods us into actually LISTENING to the sermon instead of napping... and to write down that part that applies to you... OR that you didn’t understand... OR that you disagreed with. A ‘spirit’ that convicts you of the need to take SOMETHING out of each and every worship service that will help you face the week ahead...

OK, so we may understand the 'spirit' part... but what about the 'truth.' From the word 'true'... as in the opposite of 'false?' Is Jesus calling that mountain, or that 'temple,' a 'false' place of worship? I believe that here when he speaks of worshipping in 'truth,' he is talking about the 'truest' FORM of worship. That place where the worship of Almighty God is most **pure**, the most **real**, the most **sincere**, the most **powerful**. And where might that be? HEAVEN. Where we are released from all of our human trials and limitations... where we can completely, without hesitation or self-consciousness, sing as loud, pray as demonstratively, shout 'AMEN' to our hearts content. Where our worship can go past the 'holy hour time-limit' and we won't even care...

In order to 'keep the Sabbath holy'... to respond to God's grace with lavish, unfettered generosity... to worship the Lord BOTH 'in spirit and in truth'... we must not be hampered by our insecurities, stuck in old ways, not restricted by our own self-imposed 'rules' of what is 'decent and in good order.' In the words of the prophet Isaiah: ***"The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught."***

*(Isaiah 29:13)*

So, since the Lord is concerned that our worship is consumed by too many 'human rules,' should we adopt a popular restaurant slogan as our own? **"No rules, Just right"?** Hmm. Maybe a bit too extreme. I'd say let's go with some more of Paul's words to the church: ***"For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved."*** (Romans 10:10) Believe in your heart. Openly declare your faith. Now THAT's **worship...** 'EVERY DAY'...

#### CHARGE & BENEDICTION

"Worship is so much more than the songs we sing on Sunday morning. It is the life we live the rest of the week."

"We worship God with our entire life, with every decision we make, and with everything we do.

**Jesus Christ is the living God present in common (everyday) life. (BoO W-1.1003c)**

