

# A Disciple Must Worship

## Scripture

### Psalm 95:1-7a

<sup>1</sup>O come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

<sup>2</sup>Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! <sup>3</sup>For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. <sup>4</sup>In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. <sup>5</sup>The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed. <sup>6</sup>O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! <sup>7</sup>For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. O that today you would listen to his voice!

### John 4:19-24

<sup>19</sup>The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. <sup>20</sup>Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup>You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup>But 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 to worship him. <sup>24</sup>God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

*Taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible.*

## Sermon

Today I am preaching the fourth sermon in a six-part sermon series which is based on Varnell UMC's new vision which was adopted last year. Let's say the vision again together:

“We will be an anchor in the community that finds great joy in inviting everyone to be disciples of Jesus Christ with us.”

So far I have preached about why we need a vision, I then preached about how we are to “be an anchor in the community,” and last week I preached about finding “great joy in inviting everyone to be disciples of Jesus Christ with us.” If you missed any of those sermons, I would suggest you go to our church's website. On the website you have the option of watching the sermon or you can download the manuscript and read it.

Some of you may be asking, “Isn't the church's mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world?” My answer would be “Yes. Yes it is.” That is the mission of the United Methodist Church, which we are a part of. But, each church in the United Methodist Church is different. Varnell UMC is different from Pleasant Grove UMC, and Dalton First UMC, and Smith Chapel UMC and Trinity UMC, which are all right close to us. We have different people with different gifts and talents. We serve different communities. Each United Methodist Church has to find the particular way they are going to live out that mission in their community with their particular people. The vision our church adopted last year spells out how we choose to live out the overall mission of the United Methodist Church in this community.

For today, and the next two weeks, I am going to be talking about what we understand that being “disciples of Jesus Christ” looks like. I am going to present three different areas I believe that are vital Christians must be involved in if they are going to call themselves disciples of Christ.

But before I go into the area I am going to focus on today, I need to state, first and foremost, being a disciple of Jesus Christ means you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and savior and are making the decision to now live your life for God. You have seen this wonderful act of love that God has done for us, you have repented of your sins and have accepted the sacrifice Christ made for those sins on the cross. And you have allowed the Holy Spirit to come into your life to begin to transform you and make you into the person God created us all to be, which in reality is a lifelong process.

Once you have accepted the salvation God has freely offered you, being disciples of Jesus Christ means you want to learn from Jesus and find ways to stay close to him. These two imperatives are the very core of true discipleship. These two requirements were essential for Christ's disciples while he was alive and are also necessary for followers of Christ today. The areas I am going to address today, and over the next two weeks are areas in which we can do just this: learn from Jesus and find ways to stay close to him.

The first area I want to talk about is that a true disciple worships our gracious and merciful God.

There is one thing every church does, regardless of the denomination, regardless of the setting, regardless of the day of the week. Every week we Christians gather together at some point to

worship our God. There may be a hundred other different things going on in the church throughout the week, from Bible studies to special events to people gathering in Christian fellowship to sports activities to meetings. The activities in the church may change weekly, monthly, quarterly or yearly, but the one thing you can be assured that will happen is that at a set time each week, Sundays at 8:30 AM and 11:00 AM here at Varnell, unless there is some kind of disaster or inclement weather or pandemic, people will gather together for worship. But do all of us really understand why we come to worship?

I think many people who come to church on Sunday or whenever they come to worship have a skewed view on what worship is supposed to be about. As a pastor, my experience has been there are some people who see it from a consumer standpoint. They come with questions on their heart like, “What am I going to get out of going to worship today?” or “How is the service going to help me get through my week?” For these people, worship is about them, it is about what they can get from it. That is not the reason why we are supposed to be in worship, that has never been the reason or the focus of worship. That was not why the Israelites came to the Temple nor why the early church gathered together. The reason we gather for worship each week is not for ourselves.

The main reason we should come to worship is explained in this morning’s text from John. The Gospel of John says, “true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.” It is God who seeks, who draws, who persuades us to come to worship. Worship then becomes our human response to this divine initiative. In the beginning, it was God who walked in the garden seeking out Adam and Eve. On the cross it was Jesus who drew women and men to him. It is the Holy Spirit who seeks to transform and connect with us today. Throughout the Bible we can read time and time again where God has sought to initiate, to restore, and to maintain a relationship and fellowship with His children.

Worship is supposed to be our response to all the love and grace God has shown and given us. We should come to worship God not only because of who God is, but also because of what He has done for us. His goodness, faithfulness, justice and mercy are not only etched into ancient history, but are engraved into our personal histories as well. Just because the focus is supposed to be on God does not mean we do not get anything out of coming to worship either. One of the more thought-provoking realities about our faith is the more we put into something, the more we do something for the right reasons, the more we actually get out of it.

There are a couple of things we must understand before going on. One of the first things we have to understand is what worship is not. It is not something we come to consume. The consumer world we live in would have us believe that the reason we come to worship is to get something out of it; that worship is about us. It wants us to believe we must come to learn something, to have our spirits lifted, or to feel more connected to God. It makes us think that if we do not leave every Sunday feeling like a million bucks, feeling like we got something out of it, we really did not worship or that it was a bad worship service. But that is not really what worship is about. Yes, we may take those same experiences and feelings away when we leave worship from time to time, but that is not supposed to be the focus of it.

Another thing we have to understand is that worship is not supposed to be a spectator event. Worship is not about you coming and sitting back in your chair and watching what those of us up

here in the chancel perform. To put it in sports terms, we are not the players and you are not the spectators. When it comes to worship, you are the ones that are supposed to be on the field. Those of us up here in the chancel area are supposed to be like the coaches on the sideline, who encourage, help, and guide you. We are up here trying to lead you in worship. Notice I did not say do worship, but lead. That is a big difference. We are all supposed to be worshipping together.

As our scripture this morning from John says, worship is supposed to be centered “in spirit and truth.” Worship comes about when we allow the Holy Spirit to touch our inner human spirit. A particular style and certain rituals do not ultimately produce worship. Neither does the absence of a particular style or tradition.

I cannot tell you how many times I have heard people say, “The Spirit just wasn’t here this morning.” Yes it was! Jesus told us, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20). The Spirit is always active in our worship services whether they are traditional or modern, whether it is a healing service or prayer service, as well as funeral services and weddings, which are also forms of worship services. When we gather together for worship, the Holy Spirit is present. People who claim the Spirit was not there, just failed to see where he was moving, just like many of the Jews failed to see who Jesus Christ really was.

Singing, praying, following a liturgy, and praising may all help lead us to worship, but worship is really more than any of them. For true worship to come about, our spirit must be ignited by the divine fire. And the Holy Spirit comes to us when we are gathered together for the right reasons and open to where God’s Spirit may be moving.

If God is really going to be our Lord, then worship must be a priority in the life of a true disciple, not something we come to do if nothing better comes up. When asked what commandment of God was the greatest, Jesus responded “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:37-39). Jesus tells us that our divine priority in life should be to worship first with service coming second. Our lives are supposed to be punctuated with praise, thanksgiving, and adoration. And then our service will flow out of worship.

One of our main problems with worship today is that we rarely ever spend time preparing ourselves for worship. We come each week and spend about an hour out of our busy lives, but rarely do we ever spend any of the other 167 hours each week thinking about or preparing to come to worship. Let me see a show of hands, how many of you do any kind of preparation to come to worship on Sunday morning? A few of you...

We often come to church on Sunday morning with many things on our minds and often continue thinking about these things throughout our time at the church. We come wondering what we are going to get out of our time here, and then start thinking about what and where we are going to eat for lunch and what we are going to do for the rest of the afternoon.

One of the striking features of worship throughout the Bible is that people came to worship with a sense of “holy expectancy.” They believed that when they came together to worship, they would actually hear the voice of God. When Moses entered the Tabernacle, he knew he was entering the presence of God. The same was true with the early church. As those early believers gathered together, they were keenly aware that the veil of the Temple, which supposedly separated God from the people, had been ripped in two, and like Moses they were entering the Holy of Holies as they were coming to worship with other believers. They began to realize that they no longer needed people to be intermediaries between them and God. They understood as they were coming together for worship that they were coming into the presence of God. They came together with anticipation, knowing that the Holy Spirit was present among them and would teach and touch them with his living power.

One of the ways we can cultivate this type “holy expectancy” is to spend as much of the other 167 hours a week as we can living out our lives with inward worship and adoration. As we go to work or school, as we eat and sleep, as we play and rest, we need to be listening to what the Holy Spirit might have to say to us. We should try to have a sense that we are always living in the shadow of the Almighty, wherever we are and whatever we may be doing. And once we see that God does speak to us in dozens of little ways throughout the week, we will begin to know He certainly will speak to us when we are gathered together in worship as well.

When we come together for public worship with a “holy expectancy,” it can really change the atmosphere of a room. How many of you have ever walked into a room, and before anyone said a word, you knew something was up? It was like the instant you walked through the door, it felt like you passed through some sort of invisible force field of emotions. Worship can be like that too. When people come to worship expecting to be in the presence of God, their hearts and minds are lifted upward and the air can become charged with that expectancy. When people don’t come with that expectancy, you can feel it too.

Another thing we can do is to come lifting up our hearts in adoration. Try to put away all your thoughts from the past week and what is coming up this week and contemplate God’s majesty, glory and tenderness as He is revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Pray for the pastor, the Sunday School teachers, and other worship leaders inwardly releasing them to speak the truth boldly in the power of God. And as you begin to enter the church, look around at the people who are already there and who may come in after you. Silently lift them up in prayer, but especially those who you may feel need your intercessory work, and they will be noticeable.

Another thing we can do to help produce the “holy expectancy” is to see everyone gathered in this place as THE “body of Christ.” This can be difficult sometimes because the world outside wants us so divided, it wants us to be so separated from each other, especially those of us in the church. A vital feature of the early Christian community was their sense of being “gathered” together in worship. First, they were gathered in the sense that they had actually gathered together as a group. Secondly, as they met together, they had a sense that they were gathered into the unity of the Spirit that transcended their individualism. It was like what Paul instructed in his letter to the Philippians, “Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind” (3:15). Even when it was dangerous for them to meet together, they found it unthinkable to live in isolation from one another. They understood that as they came together in worship, things would occur that would never occur if they were alone. We may come to church on Sunday as

individuals and families, but in the power of the Spirit, we become enveloped in a sense of unity and of God's Presence which quiets us and brings about a peace and connectedness of all our lives.

To worship is to experience reality. It is to know, to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community. God is always actively seeking worshipers who will involve their whole being. He wants us to do as Paul wrote in his letter to the Colossians: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:16-17).

The book of Psalms is great place to look to when you want to see forms of worship. This book could probably be considered the Book of Worship of the Bible. And our text today from Psalm 95, points us in the direction I have been talking about for most of the sermon. Listen to those words again:

O 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.

Our God is an awesome God and he is worthy of our worship. He is supposed to be why we come to worship. We are his children and we should always honor and respect Him with our worship, not only on Sunday morning but throughout our daily lives as well.

## **Sources Used**

*Celebration of Discipline*; Foster, Richard J.; © 1988 by Richard J. Foster; Harper & Row, Publishers Inc.; New York, NY.

*Come Let Us Worship and Bow Down*; Sermon by Adam Hamilton.

*What Is Worship? A Survey of Scripture*; <http://www.gci.org/God/worship>