

Lenten Worship

Psalm 100, Revelation 7:9-17, Deuteronomy 26:1-11

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First Presbyterian, Luling

When I was growing up, we went to church every single Sunday. If we were in town, we were going to church. I don't have a lot of specific memories of church when I was little. The ceiling of the sanctuary was wood, and I remember trying to count the number of boards on one side, and see if it was the same as the number of boards on the other side, but I always lost my place and had to start over. I was an acolyte starting in about third grade probably, and I remember watching to see if the flame on the candle I had lit was standing up straighter than the one my acolyte partner had lit. And then further imagining that the candle flames posture indicated the state of our souls. Needless to say, I don't think I did a lot of close listening to sermons, but I absorbed important messages. I learned what it was to be a part of a community, tolerating things I didn't always understand or enjoy for the sake of someone else. I learned that adults were people too. I learned that this group of people thought worshipping God was important enough that they got up every Sunday morning, just like we did, to gather at church together.

That's been my pattern for every Sunday morning for decades now. Go to church. Gather together with the Body of Christ. Worship God. I mean, sure there have been occasional Sundays when I didn't do that—vacations or traveling or illness or something else. But by and large, I've been in church for worship probably 98% of the Sundays in my life. Well, until last week. And then I was in worship, sort of, with you, on the phone. Which was weird and wonderful. And today, which is also weird and wonderful. Weird, because it's so different to gather in this way. And wonderful, because it's so good to hear your voices and see some of your faces.

Our final Lenten spiritual discipline is worship. It's not a big surprise that the idea of worship is firmly rooted in Scripture. We had three readings today because I couldn't narrow it down any more than that. The people of Israel structured their lives and weeks around Sabbath and worship. And they structured their year around festivals and worship. And they wrote and sang Psalms to observe both of those kinds of occasions. So Psalm 100 is just an example of a Psalm that calls us to worship. We worship God, the psalmist says, because we belong to God, and God takes care of us. We're God's people, so we

worship God with singing and joyful noises. It's a plural psalm, with "we" and "our." Worship here is something we do together.

Next up is the passage from Revelation: it is a picture of what heavenly worship might be. People gathered from all over the earth, along with angels and creatures we don't otherwise know about, and they worship God day and night. And I'm going to read that closing line to you again, just because I think we need to hear it: "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." Again, this is a picture of a community, a community beyond anything we could construct or imagine, joining together in worship, with their whole selves, not pretending to be happy when they are sad, or strong when they are weak. They bring all of themselves to worship, and worship encompasses their lives.

The passage in Deuteronomy is one of the earliest examples of an order of worship from the Israelite people. Deuteronomy says take the first fruits of the harvest and bring it to the temple, offer it to the Lord, and re-tell the salvation history of your people, remember all that God has done for you, over generations. Be thankful to God for all God has done, for all God has promised. It's a combination of thanksgiving and offering, brought together in worship. It's a little more individualized, because each family is expected to make this thank offering, but they're coming together to do so.

So three examples of worship from Scripture, each involving people coming together to worship, in a community. And yet here we sit, each in our own houses, apart from each other. But we are together. We've set a time and sort of a place, to join together in something different than we're doing the rest of our weeks. Hopefully we've set aside as many distractions as we can in order to concentrate on worship.

That's a discipline. Making time for worship each week. Coming together however we can manage it. Setting aside other things and distractions. It's a discipline, a spiritual discipline. Maybe the most visible and verifiable spiritual discipline to people outside the church, because this is primarily what they see us do.

Talking about worship as a spiritual discipline could likely be a sermon series in and of itself, so I'm just going to limit myself to saying one other thing about it. A month or so ago, that now seems like a year ago, on the first week of our Lenten Bible Study, Arelis said that whatever our position in life is, our calling is to glorify God. I imagine that she was thinking of the first question of the Westminster Catechism, which maybe some of you memorized as children. In its original form it asks, "what is the chief end of man?" And the answer is "to glorify

God and enjoy him forever.” Our highest and most important purpose, as human beings, is to glorify God. That’s it. Worship is our highest priority.

Therefore we are called to worship and glorify God in everything we do. We can’t confine it to a Sunday morning, whether gathered in a sanctuary or huddled over our phones in our houses. Whatever our situation, whatever our activities, whatever our calling in life may be right now, let’s worship God by glorifying God in the midst of it.