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Psalm 148
How to be a Christian: How to Worship

When people attend our new members conference, we always ask them: “Why do you want to join Georgetown Presbyterian Church?” We hear common responses such as - for the beautiful music, the great sermons, the children’s programs, the chance to do mission work. Never have I heard someone say, “because my inmost being cries out in need of worshipping God Almighty.” Worship is the reason the church exists. Yes, there are a variety of reasons we go to church but the church without worship is a just club or a social service organization. Worshipping God makes us the church the church. I believe worship is something that connects to a very deep part of our beings whether we always realize it or not. There is something about worshipping God that is intrinsic to being human. In our souls, there is a need for connection with our Creator. In Psalm 148, not just humanity is called to worship the Lord but all of creation is called to worship, heaven and earth and everything in them must worship and the psalmist spends no time giving any tangible reasons for it.

Praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD from the heavens;
 praise him in the heights!
Praise him, all his angels;
 praise him, all his host!
Praise him, sun and moon;
 praise him, all you shining stars!
Praise him, you highest heavens
 and you waters above the heavens!

Why? Just because. Like a compass pointing to a magnetic north, we cannot help but turn ourselves towards the divine in praise. Jewish mystics have claimed that the name of God, “Yahweh,” is the very sound of our breath entering and leaving the body. “Yah,” inhaling, and “weh” exhaling. Yah-weh. God’s name on our lips from the very beginning to the end – our lives as worship. From our first breath until our final breath, we are worshipping the divine as though it is the most natural thing to be done.

Last summer, I drove through the Greek countryside to visit the ancient town of Corinth where Paul spent time starting a church. To get there, we drove through sprawling fields of enormous sunflowers. The radiant yellow faces of the flowers were reaching to the sky, stretching their very beings as though in praise of the divine as if they could do nothing else. But unlike the very natural praise from the sunflowers and the mountains and the sea and the trees, as humans, we often fall out of the habit of constant worship, we forget this inner compulsion to connect with the divine. Yahweh no longer feels as close as our very breath and so worship feels harder, less natural.

Every Sunday we need some realignment – our lives must be reoriented towards what is good and what is true – reoriented towards God. We come to worship to sit in a special place and use special words and sing special songs because we need to break out of the habits of the rest of the week, which teach us to worship and honor and love all the wrong things. Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann says that all the 150 psalms can be put in three categories - orientation, disorientation, or new orientation. Psalm 148 is one of the new orientation psalms where every aspect of creation is given the calling to turn towards the divine in praise. Worship offers us a new orientation.

In one hour, while nestled into a pew, your entire life can be reoriented. The Call to Worship orients you again to your place and space in God's world. The prayer of confession, the prayers of the people, the scripture readings, even the sermon may remind you of all that is broken in the world, and we recognize the disorientation that comes as being part of a fallen humanity. The new orientation comes from being grounded in God's love and magnificence and then being sent out into the world to build the kingdom, to love and serve, to live and move and have our beings with Yahweh as close as our very breath. In one hour, you can go through that cycle and be given a new start for the week.

Worship isn't really about the music, or the bad jokes the preacher makes, or even to hear what the cute kids will say – it is to have our souls reoriented towards the divine in the world. Martin Luther said, "Prayer is a vitamin for the soul." I think that can be said about worship – it is a vitamin for our souls.

Last week, I was working with the 3rd – 5th graders in children's church. We were drafting prayers that would be written by the children for the children of GPC. We were writing prayers for the new school year, prayers for friendship, prayers for when we feel sick. I was trying to get them to help me draft the prayers in their own words. When we were thinking about what they would pray when they were sick, they said would ask to feel better and ask for it go away quickly. I asked what made them feel better when they were sick, they said, "Good food to eat and things to drink" and, "Entertainment." It made me laugh because it was very on point and honest.

We live in this entertainment driven world where our brains need be fed constantly. Far be it from me to fold a load of laundry when I am not also listening to a podcast, or talking on the phone, or watching TV. In this entertainment dominant culture, it is hard for a Presbyterian congregation that is 243 years old to keep up. But the secret is...we are not trying to keep up. Some churches have tried, big rock bands, screens displaying words, pictures, videos, pastors with flashy clothes and fancy hairdos and weird eyeglasses. Let us entertain you, it all screams. But entertainment is just not an objective for us as we think about how to lead, construct, or do worship. Some might even argue we intentionally try to bore you. I remember two years ago on vacation, I took my kids to a Presbyterian and during a pregnant pause in the middle of the

sermon my son, who could not say his R's, stood up and loudly said, "Let's go, this is bowwwwwing."

It is supposed to be boring, son, that is the Presbyterian tradition! The Reformers stripped the churches from all stained glass and artwork that might distract us from anything but God alone. The ministers wore plain black robes without any ornamentation. Even the musical instruments were taken away from the sacred spaces. Still today, the hour of worship is intentionally different from how we spend other hours of our lives. And so, the reorientation process can begin as soon as you sit down on a hard church pew and try to settle in!

Maybe a new member is going to tell me they would really like to join our church because they find it so boring – and in their boredom they are able to let go of their constant need to be entertained – and in letting go they are able to open their mind to spiritual thoughts and attune to the divine order of creation – and connecting with the divine they are sustained in their work and their lives and their faith. They will shake my hand at the church door and say, "Thank you, Pastor Camille for the gift of an incredibly boring hour in my week." "You are welcome," I will say proudly.

Worship is not entertainment. Worship is reorientation. So how do we worship? Well – sit yourself down, orient yourselves to your surroundings, take a deep breath, and allow Yahweh back in. God desires connection with creation. Your soul desires connection with its Creator. Worship is the channel to help you to get there.

Amen.