**Celebrating the Glory of God**

**Psalm 100, John 4:16-26**

11/15/15

Thought for Meditation:

In a real sense we are what we eat – or drink. We take on the color – the character – of what we worship (which is a form of eating and drinking).

To worship God is to be fed by God. To continually avoid the worship of God is to starve – to be starved, to go hungry, to become a “poor tree.”
Strangely – God takes the risk where we are concerned. God leaves the choice to us – to worship God or not to worship God. And – not so strangely – the consequences are ours also.

Garbage in, garbage out. Worship in, a renewed and healthy life out. *H.R Anderson Jr*

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Worship is the most important activity of the church. Everything else that we tend to associate with the church is secondary. We have a wonderful building here, but you don’t need a building to have a church. If you read the history of Sharon church it talks about people worshipping in this community back in the 1790s. Sharon church was officially established in 1817. It was first called Flaugherty Run Mission. Yet the first sanctuary was not built until 1828. For the first years the church worshipped in homes of the members. They even bought a tent for worship. The building is not a church.

My favorite activity in church is Sunday school, or small groups and Bible studies. I love teaching and going to Sunday school. However, Sunday school is a relatively new idea. The first Sunday school started in 1782 and was not a common practice until probably the beginning of the 20th century. The church existed for close to 1800 years without Sunday school.

This is hard to say as a Presbyterian, but the church could even exist without committees and meetings. One time I had a seminary professor who suggested that most congregations would be better off if, for one year, they canceled every meeting, and instead spent the time in worship, prayer and Bible study. If all the other activities and programs disappear, and worship continued, you would still have a church. Don’t get me wrong. I’m not suggesting that we get rid of anything. I’m simply trying to point out that the most important thing we do as a church is worship.

We have been looking at our new mission statement. There are four basic parts to it – worship, caring for each other – that is fellowship, growing in our faith, and sharing God’s love and the good news of Jesus. I like to put them in that order because it is easy to remember – worship, care, grow, and share. The mission statement has them in the opposite order with worship at the end, which highlights worship as the most important, ultimate aspect of the church.

At this point, a natural question might be, “How should we worship? If worship is so important let’s make sure to do it right.” It’s not a bad question. It is just the wrong one. How we worship is similar to the question the woman at the well raised with Jesus – where should we worship? Jews and Samaritans worshipped in different places and in different ways. Jesus didn’t really answer her question. Instead, he said that what we need is to ask the question “Who?” and “Why?” “What God wants is for us to worship in spirit and truth.” Who is the god we worship and why is worship so important?

Let me start with why, and suggest that there are at least two reasons why we need to make worship a priority in our lives and in our church. First, worship is important because we need it. Max Lucado says that everyone suffers from poor I-sight. This is not a problem that Joe can solve in his office. The problem that we have is not “e-y-e-sight,” but “I-sight.” No matter how well we can see the world, we all have a distorted self-image. Our I-sight is blurry. I’m sure this is an oversimplification, but eyes usually have one of two problems. They are either far-sighted or near-sighted. In the same way, people usually have one of two I-sight problems.

Some people think of themselves as better than they really are. This is called pride. There was a turtle that lived out at Raccoon Creek State Park. He didn’t like the cold weather of winter, so he thought he would spend the winter in Florida. He knew he could never walk that far so he came up with a brilliant plan. He convinced a couple of geese to carry a rope between them as they flew south. The turtle clamped his vise-like jaws onto the rope. The geese started flying and the turtle headed toward Florida. Someone on the ground saw the turtle being carried on the rope. They said “That’s brilliant. I wonder who thought of that.” The turtle heard the comment and was filled with pride. He wanted to take credit, so he opened his mouth to shout, “I did…” The turtle didn’t make it to Florida. Some people have an I-sight problem in that they think way too highly of themselves.

Others go to the opposite extreme. Their I-sight is so distorted that they think they are worthless. They think of themselves as failures and insignificant. They take the attitude that the world would be a better place if they weren’t here. They don’t think that they can do anything of any value.

The cure for poor I-sight at either extreme is worship. In worship we take our eyes off ourselves and focus our attention on God. God gives us 20/20 I-sight. Dad and his nine year-old son were out walking in the snow. There was a tree about twenty yards in front of them. Dad challenged his son to see who could walk the straightest line from where they were to the tree. They walked to the tree and then looked back at their footprints. The son’s footprints wound their way around toward the tree. Dad’s steps were a straight line. Dad said to his son, “You were watching your feet as you walked. I kept my eyes focused on the tree.

Our I-sight is distorted. The cure for that is to focus our attention, focus our lives, on God. That is what worship is – turning our eyes, our hearts and our minds, to God, who is the center of worship.

The second reason why we need to make worship a priority is because God deserves it. This is not only the why question, but the who question. God is worthy of our worship. Look at Psalm 100 with me. This psalm is one of the best known psalms and probably is used in worship more than any other psalm. A few months ago we switched the doxology that we use after the offering. The older version of the doxology, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow,” is sung to a tune called “Old Hundredth.” That name comes from the hundredth Psalm. We are actually going to sing Psalm 100 to that tune after the sermon.

The Psalm is an invitation to worship. There are seven imperative verbs calling us to join with all creation in worship. “Make a joyful noise… Worship the Lord… come into his presence… Know that the Lord is God… Enter his gates… Give thanks to him… Bless his name.”

The psalm also gives us several reasons for our worship. Verse three tells us that God “made us.” This is not so much focused on God as creator, though that is certainly there. The focus is on Yahweh as the one who chose Israel as his people, who delivered Israel from Egypt and who made them into a nation. Verse three also tells us that God is our shepherd, who leads us, who cares for us and protects us.

Verse five gives us the main reason that God deserves our worship. “The Lord is good.” In some ways “good” seems like a rather empty word. If the paper tomorrow says that the Steelers played a “good” game today, that could mean that in spite of playing decently, they still lost. We want the Steelers to play a great game. Yet the word “good” in the psalm is not to be compared with great, but to be contrasted with bad. Our God is not an evil god, or a god whose character can be questioned. Our God, Yahweh, is good.

This goodness is seen in the next two words that describe God – loving and faithful. God loves us with a love that far surpasses any other love. God is also faithful, dependable – we can count on him. I like the way The Message translates verse five – “God is sheer beauty, all-generous in love, loyal always and ever.” This goodness, this love and faithfulness is timeless. It “endures forever,… to all generations.” The God who is on our side has always been on our side and will be for us and with us forever.

Why should we worship? First, we need worship – it focuses our attention on God rather than on ourselves. And second, God deserves our worship. God is glorious and holy and worthy of all our praise.

Having said all of that, I’d like to share with you another image. This image is one that has the potential to transform our understanding and our experience of worship. It comes from another Max Lucado book.

Imagine that you are getting onto a plane, headed somewhere on vacation or business. You climb into your seat and you are surrounded by other people. Some gaze out the window. Some are already asleep. Some are reading or looking at their computer. For the most part everyone is in their own little world. Their view of a good flight is one that gets to their destination safely, with as few problems as possible.

One passenger has a very different attitude. A young boy enters the plane with his mom. Right as they enter the plane the boy asks, “Will I get to meet the pilot?” The pilot heard the question and stuck his head out of the cockpit. “Is someone looking for me?” The boy stuck his hand up like he was answering a question at school. The pilot invited him into the cockpit and showed him all the controls and gauges. A few minutes later the boy came back out, his eyes wide open with wonder. He exclaimed “Wow! I’m so glad we get to fly on this plane.”

All the other passengers on the plane were content with a nice and predictable flight. This boy wanted more than that. He wanted to see the pilot. At the end of the flight, if someone asked him how the trip was he wouldn’t say “nice.” With excitement in his voice he would beam, “I got to see the man up front.”

In some ways people who come to church and sit in the pews are not that different from the people who sit in the seats of a plane. For many people, the mark of a good flight and the mark of a good worship service are the same. We are content for worship to be safe and predictable. We don’t want any turbulence or surprises. We want to hear an uplifting message and a pretty anthem. We want to sing some of our favorite songs and hope the prayers aren’t too boring. We want to reach our destination in one hour, or at most five minutes over that. And then we leave the same as we entered in.

On the other hand, some people enter worship with a childlike enthusiasm, with a sense of expectation that something might happen. God might speak. The Spirit might act. Some people come to worship knowing that they are coming into the presence of the Lord, the God of the universe. They know that in worship they are entering into the great mystery of the Incarnation and the mystery of the Trinity. If we enter worship with this type of attitude and expectation we might just leave with the wide-eyed wonder of having been in the presence of the pilot. (*from “Just Like Jesus” by Max Lucado*)

The mission of the church is first and foremost to worship. We worship God, the creator of the universe. We worship Yahweh, the God of Israel. We worship God who is revealed in Jesus Christ. We worship the Holy Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Our mission includes caring, growing and sharing. But above all, the mission of the church is worship. Will you please stand and join me in confessing our faith using the mission statement of Sharon Church:

The Mission of Sharon Community Presbyterian Church is to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, welcome and encourage all who want to grow in faith, care for those in need and celebrate the glory of God in worship and in our daily lives.