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 October 9, 2022
 5th Mark Vital Church

Spirit-Filled Worship
Hebrews 4:9-16

So then, a Sabbath rest still remains for the people of God, ¹⁰ for those who enter God's^[d] rest also rest from their labors as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs.

*¹² Indeed, the word of God is **living and active and sharper** than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And before him no creature is hidden, but all are **naked and laid bare** to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.*

Jesus the Great High Priest

*¹⁴ Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested^[e] as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore **approach the throne of grace with boldness**, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Today is our **5th Mark of a Vital Church---**

We've talked about

1. Lifelong discipleship
2. Authentic Evangelism
3. An Outward Focus
4. Servant leadership

And today we are talking about **5. Spirit-filled worship.**

So today I want you to think about this—

When and where have you experienced the **power of worship?**

What are some of the most **meaningful parts of worship** for you?

I know that sometimes I am convicted and inspired by the **Word**, sometimes I am humbled and overcome with emotion in **communion**.

Sometimes I am moved to tears by powerful *music*,
and other times I am moved to tears in the *silent prayers of confession*.

What do you *look forward to*, when you come to worship?
When in worship are *you drawn* into the presence of God?

Isn't that the *point* of worship?
Getting drawn into God's presence?
Worship isn't just about what we get from it---
it's about coming to *honor and praise* God!
As we come to God in praise and adoration,
as we come to *give* our lives to God in worship,
that's when we *receive* the blessing and power of God!

Romans 12:1-2 reminds us that *presenting ourselves as a living sacrifice* to God,
is our true worship!

The problem is, we so often come to worship,
Only looking for what *God will give* us,
not what we can give to God.
We don't always think about the ways we can *offer ourselves* to God,
The ways we can offer our hearts, our confession and repentance,
our praise and thanksgiving for every good gift!
We don't always come ready to offer our *time, talent, and treasure*.

Of course, this is understandable.
We are so often *worn down* by the world—and all of our trials and challenges,
That we come to worship *almost empty*—needing to be filled by God.

But that's where we encounter the crazy holy math of God.
That *when we give, we receive*,
That when we open our hearts and lives, even when we feel empty,
That's when we are *filled to overflowing with the love and power of God*.

Bringing ourselves to God is the purpose of worship,
Because *the FOCUS of worship is God!*

The blessings we receive
are a *by-product* of focusing on God.

Kind of like what happens when we focus on *giving instead of receiving*—
we learn that in the act of giving we are blessed!
So worship is this time to *bring ourselves to God*,
And *focus* on God.

In our Book of Confessions is the Westminster Catechism,
a series of faith questions and answers.
And it begins with the question: *What is the chief end of man?*
And the answer is: *To glorify God and enjoy God forever!*

Now think about that—our *chief purpose in life is NOT work*,
It's *worship!*
Worship---glorifying and enjoying God!

John Calvin said we have *no greater help in life, than worship!*
And in Hebrews we hear that we have *direct access to God in worship*,
through Jesus Christ!
He is our *high priest*, someone who has been tested as we have, but without sin.
Jesus is the one who has *suffered FOR us* on the cross,
but also suffers *WITH us* in our trials and temptations!
Jesus is our *intercessor*, and our *model* for life.
And in worship we can come directly to Him!
Think about how incredible that is!
What does that mean to you---
That worship is the *most powerful and helpful thing*
we can do in life as Christians?

And what *happens* in worship?
On the front of your bulletin today is the *Presbyterian Church USA seal*—
and it's a powerful symbol of some different elements of worship.

Of course you see the cross right away, symbolizing *Jesus*.
But if you look carefully you also can see a *lectern or pulpit*,
And a book—*the Bible*—is open on it,
symbolizing the reading and preaching of God's Word.

And in that same symbol you can also see a *baptismal font*,
And a *large cup*, like that in the Lord's Supper.

Coming down on all of it is the *dove*—a symbol of the Holy Spirit,

the spirit that comes to us in the *Word and Sacraments*,
and the *fire* around the cross is the Spirit that started the church at *Pentecost*.
The whole image is a *triangle*, reminding us that the *Trinity* is involved in each
and every act of worship—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Inside our bulletin are sections that describe the *movement of worship*—
from Gathering, the Word, to Response, and Sending.

And all throughout the service we have *elements like*
praise and thanksgiving,
confession, the Word, music, prayer, silence,
and sacraments like Baptism and the Lord's Supper.
Worship is a *combination* of all these powerful elements.

And Hebrews 4 reminds us of the *POWER of worship itself*.
It all starts with Sunday—*the day of rest*—the Sabbath—
the day we focus on God and resting from work.
And it centers around *God's Word*---which is *living and active*,
it exposes our hearts and lives and judges our intentions.

Hebrews tells us that in worship we *enter the very presence of God*—
We *approach the throne of grace*—with boldness.

Isn't that a beautiful image?
Jesus has a throne of *grace*—not a throne of a king who wields power or control
over us, but a throne of grace.
And a throne we can approach with *boldness*---
not fear like an earthly king or throne.
And when we approach, we *receive mercy and grace to* help in our times of need.

So we come to worship on a day of *rest*,
We come to *hear and respond to the Word* of God,
We come to *enter God's presence*,
And when we do---we *receive the mercy and grace* we so desperately need!

Sounds wonderful, right?
And it is!
But to truly worship, we have to *LET GO of some of our pride and preferences*.

Ever heard of the C.S. Lewis book, *The Screwtape Letters*?

It's an allegory--letters from Satan, aka "Uncle Screwtape"—who is trying to teach his little nephew "Wormwood" how to turn a man away from Jesus and his faith.

In Letter 16, Screwtape points out to Wormwood that the "patient" upon whom he is working is attending a church but is *not quite satisfied* with it.

Screwtape says, "*Surely you know that if a man can't be cured of churchgoing, the next best thing is to send him all over the neighborhood looking for the church that "suits" him until he becomes a taster or connoisseur of churches*"

Then he goes on to talk about the **different opinions that lead to dissension** within churches...he says, "*if your patient can't be kept out of Church, he ought at least to be violently attached to some party within it. I don't mean on doctrinal issues; about those the more lukewarm he is, the better. It is NOT the doctrines on which we [devils] chiefly depend for producing malice. The real fun is working up hatred between those who say "mass", vs. those who say "communion"and all the purely indifferent things—like candles and clothes and what not—[they] are an admirable ground for OUR activities.*"

C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, MacMillan: NY, 1961, pg. 75.

Well, that's humbling, isn't it?

For ALL of us!

How often have we been *distracted* by the choice of flowers or instruments or wording or what people are wearing?

Ever found yourselves grumbling about a hymn that is hard to sing, or the sound of the organ, or drums, or a sermon that seems too long?

The Enemy can use all of our *concerns about these insignificant things* and all of our own personal preferences about worship--- to cloud our vision, and even *turn us away* from the true focus of worship— which is God alone.

Worship is all about the *mystery and majesty of God*.

And when we come to *focus on God*,

When we *listen, praise, confess, and glorify* in music and speech,

When we *hear and respond* to the Word,

And *celebrate* the Sacraments,

Then we are *filled* with God's power and presence---*That's Worship!*

Yesterday in the Upper Room Disciplines online, I read this:

*Worship should be **healing**.*

*It is a time to **remember** the moments when despite what was happening around us, we knew we would survive. It involves **memories of beloved people, words of promise, and joyful singing and praise**. Over the years, we have **argued** so much about form in worship that we have often forgotten its **function**: **joyful praise of a faithful and loving God, thanksgiving to God for healing both past and present struggles, and hearing God's promise of hope for the future through Jesus Christ....** Jonathan Wallace, Upper Room Daily Disciplines, October 8, 2022.*

Joyful praise.

Thanksgiving.

God's promise of hope through Jesus.

Isn't that a **great description of what we're doing here?**

We do not come here to worry about the form of worship,

Or to focus on personal preferences,

But to **offer praise—and thanks—and to hear the promises** of God!

We come to **allow the living word** to cut into our hearts and lives.

When Hebrews talks about God's Word

it's kind of like a '**holy operating room for the soul**'—

because the Word of God cuts deep into our hearts—**to bring us healing and hope**.

Have you ever thought about God's Word that way?

As a source of **healing**?

Hearing God's Word helps us approach the throne of grace with boldness!

And we **each have a PART to play in worship**.

Worship is **NOT a spectator** sport.

We invite all ages and stages to participate and share their gifts in worship,

And we celebrate that unity and diversity.

We invite **everyone** to join in prayer and praise, in singing, and even in the silence.

Presbyterian Pastors are known as **Ministers of Word and Sacrament---**

because our jobs include preaching and teaching the Word,

and performing the sacraments of Lord's Supper and baptism in worship.

But did you know that ***ALL members of our churches are known as ministers?***
 We believe in what the Bible calls ***the priesthood of all believers,***

1 Peter 2:9-10 says this about church members:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people,^[d] in order that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

¹⁰ *Once you were not a people,
 but now you are God's people;
 once you had not received mercy,
 but now you have received mercy.*

In other words,

we all have a ***calling to minister in different ways***
 in the body of Christ the church,
 and all of us are called to ***share the good news when we leave here!***

We come to worship to honor and glorify God,
 And receive God's power and presence,
 And then we leave filled with ***healing and hope***—
 So we can ***go out and share*** that with the world around us!

How can you do that, this week?

How can you come as a ***believers, a minister,***
 How can you gather in praise and thanks,
 And then respond by ***taking God's grace*** out into the world?

And how will we ***open our hearts*** in worship?
 How will we actually ***offer ourselves*** to God in worship?
How will we hear and respond to God's healing Word?

And how will we take the ***good news and grace,*** into our corner of the world?

Friends the ***Good News of the Gospel today is this:***

We approach God's throne of grace in worship!
 We bring our hearts and lives, in praise and thanksgiving,
 We focus on God,
 And we receive the mercy and grace we need!
 For the gift of worship, all God's people can say together: Amen!