

Heb. 9:11-15

June 5, 2022

Luke 24:13-16, 28-32

**Community of Celebration
Worshipping God Together**

Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs, Psalm 100:2.

The most recognizable characteristic of Christ's disciples – the assembly of believers – is that by and large they obey the command to come before the Lord. They may not always come with joyful songs and gladness, but getting together on Sunday morning is the most obvious thing they do. If every Christian believer took seriously this gathering to worship ... if every member of this congregation was here on Sunday ... the whole life of the Church would be transformed and every Christian believer would be transformed.

Centered on Celebrating Christ

What's church for anyway? As we have noted in the past several weeks the Church is the "called-out assembly" of those who know Jesus as the Son of the living God, as the Lord, and the One in whom we have forgiveness of sin and salvation. **Church is also God's instrument for sharing this good news.**

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light, 1 Peter 2:9.

As Christ's creation, the Church is expected to declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light. The first Christians were Jews, long accustomed to worship on the Sabbath, the 7th day of the week... the day God rested from all His labor of creating the universe.

Yet what happened at Easter, on the 1st day of the week - Sunday, was so dramatic and life-changing, that Christians gathered to praise God on that day. The day of resurrection, the day Christ broke forever the bonds of sin and death, initiated a new creation, dramatically unveiling God's love and purpose for us. So, on Sunday, we declare the praises of God who has raised us to new life in Jesus Christ. Christian worship is really about remembering and praising God's victory, for our sake, over the dark world of sin and death. That's news worth shouting and singing about.

Though worship styles among Christians may vary, one thing remains constant: the object of our worship. We worship God our heavenly Father known to us in Jesus Christ. We must remain **centered on Christ** right here **in the center of Bakersfield.**

Center on God Not Humanity

Church services that are designed primarily to "do us good" or give us a spiritual shot in the arm, or to show what we can do with music, or preaching, or dance, miss the point of true worship. Of course, **our worship must connect with people, but the point is to honor God.** Our state of mind or emotions is less important than His glory.

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth, Psalm 121:2. And from this statement flows our confession of sin. To truly believe in "the Lord, who made heaven and earth" is to recognize just how far we are from doing His will. Then the

words of assurance that follow speak the promise that to those who confess their sin, God is faithful and just to forgive their sin. This isn't mere ritual (or shouldn't be). It is placing worshipers in **the only proper relationship to God: that of forgiven sinners before a forgiving Father.** That's why we honor Him. Christian worship is saying: ***Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!*** Rev. 5:12.

Singing the Gospel

Have you ever felt like you were dragging through a lifeless ritual on Sunday, or that church is boring most of the time? **If we don't guard our hearts we become mere spectators in Christian worship.** The important thing is to stay centered on God. Advertisements often use "jingles," because song keeps the message in our memory and on our mind. So too, songs and hymns of the faith. Early Christian hymns followed the pattern of the hymnbook of the Jewish Temple worship: the Psalms. ***Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day,*** Psalm 96:2.

The Psalms provide a great model for Christian singing, with their stress on the total giving of self to God's adoration and glorification. St. Paul gave instructions to Christians on singing: ***... be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,*** Eph. 5:18-20.

Many Church **revivals** over the centuries **have been accompanied and spread by new hymns and songs.** ***Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth,*** Psalm 96:2. Charles Wesley's hymns are still the life-blood of Methodist worship. His many new songs were written to express praise of God and to explain the faith. In the front of our UMC hymnal you will find John Wesley's "Directions for Singing." It says (among other things) "... beware of singing as if you were half dead, or half asleep; but lift up your voice with strength." "...Do not bawl, so as to be heard above or distinct from the rest of the congregation ... but strive to unite your voices together, so as to make one clear melodious sound." But here's the salient word: "Above all sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing."

Times change and styles in music change. Just remember that those "old hymns" we sing at Chapel and 9:30 were once contemporary. No matter the style, what's essential is that we declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness.

Acting the Gospel

One of our hymns, speaking of the Church, says, "One holy Name she blesses, Partakes one holy food." **Since the beginning of the Church, partaking one holy food – that is, Holy Communion – has been central to worship.** This has been passed down to us as a specific command of Jesus. ***Do this in remembrance of me, He commanded, when we eat the bread and drink from His cup,*** Luke 22:19.

Sometimes the most sublime truths cannot be spoken but only acted. Shortly after Jesus' resurrection, two disciples were walking from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus. A stranger joined their walk and they invited him to stay for supper. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to

them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him... Luke 24:30-31. They knew it was Jesus because He **“was recognized by them when he broke the bread.”** It has been true for Christians ever since.

Here’s several things I’d like you to understand and remember about Communion:

1. **Holy Communion is for those who know that they are not good enough.** Participation is based on confession of sin not self-congratulation of one’s own goodness.
2. **Communion is the gospel in action:** God, in Jesus, has come to us and by His sacrificial death redeemed our lives. The Bible tells us this, the sermons explain this, and the sacrament dramatizes it. “This is my body, this is my blood, given for you.”
3. **In Communion we are saying that we want Christ to be our daily bread.**
4. **The sacrament unites us with fellow believers worldwide.** We are individuals before God and we are a community united together before God - this is “the communion of the saints.”
5. The bread and wine (God’s gifts of food) are symbols of our earthly labor. God uses ordinary things as means to reveal His grace to us. He can make all things in life sacred and holy.

A Foretaste of the Kingdom of God

Worship is essential to the life of the Church established by Christ. There are so many things, ideas, and people who vie for our devotion and our resources, that it is tempting to worship those things without realizing it. Christian worship acknowledges who is God and who or what is not. Worship is giving thanks and praise to Him for who He is and for what He has done on our behalf.

Do not forget the covenant I have made with you, and do not worship other gods. Rather, worship the LORD your God; it is he who will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies, 2 Kings 17:38-39. Our primary enemy is our own sin and the Evil One who seeks to enslave us to sin. Sunday worship reminds us to celebrate the forgiveness of sin that we have in Jesus, praising God for this great gift. **Our worship is showing our gratitude to God through our offerings of money and service.**

(How much more, then, will the blood of Christ... who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! Heb. 9:15).

What kind of attitude and expectation do you bring to worship? What do you bring on Sunday mornings? Sure, we all have our times of sadness, loss, anger, frustration, and more. Yet once in the sanctuary we can give it all to God and let Him take center stage. If we’ve prayed about this day all those other distractions will be taken care of. Jesus said, ***...a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks, John 4:23-24.*** That’s a foretaste of heaven.

As more of us came here on Sunday at 7:30, or 9:30, fully prayed up and prepared to come before our Creator and Savior to sing with a cheerful voice, to forgive and be

forgiven, and giving thanks to the Almighty; I daresay the whole life of our church would be transformed.

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name, Heb. 13:15.