

First Presbyterian Church
Cheyenne, Wyoming
February 7, 2010
Rev. Bob Garrard

Worship Theme: Why We Worship as We Do
Isaiah 6: 1-13, I Corinthians 15: 1-11

On occasion members ask me why we worship the way we do on Sunday mornings. We have held classes on this twice over the years and those who attended found it helpful. This morning we are going to do a brief exploration of why we worship as we do in the context of today's scripture lessons. A couple of questions are in order to start us off. When we come to worship on Sunday morning—what do we expect? Think about that for a few seconds. Now, allow me to ask another question for you to ponder—what is expected of us? As far as our expectations go, I suspect we anticipate God's presence to be with us. One of the first things declared at the opening of our worship is that God is present to nurture us in our faith in Jesus Christ. From all I have learned about worship from the Bible, God expects us to be present too, not just bodily, but in mind, heart and spirit with eyes and ears open to the message he has to give us.

There are a couple of definitions of worship I like that definitely include our involvement. The Danish Theologian, Søren Kierkegaard, wrote that we ought to think of a worship service in terms of a reverse theatre presentation. In worship, God is the audience and we are the actors. All we do in worship is for the glory of God. If anyone is to be entertained, it is God. This means that not only are the pastors, musicians and choirs to come prepared to actively lead the worship of God, but so is the rest of the congregation. God is to be the sole focus of the worship service. God is the audience and we are the actors—active and involved actors.

The "Directory for Worship" in our Book of Order also has a God centered definition of worship that expects our participation. It is in our bulletin announcements. Note the verbs in the definition. "Christian worship joyfully ascribes all praise and honor, glory and power to the triune God. In worship the people of God acknowledge God present in the world and in their lives. As they respond to God's claim and redemptive action in Jesus Christ, believers are transformed and renewed. In worship the faithful offer themselves to God and are equipped for God's service in the world." Of course, we cannot do all this ourselves. We need the Holy Spirit to help us, yet we must be willing participants. Our order of worship is designed to keep the congregation actively involved and focused on God. W-1.1001 Directory For Worship, Book of Order, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

As we heard in the Old Testament Lesson, the 25 year-old priest, Isaiah, was indeed paying attention and participating in worship as God was overwhelmingly present in the temple that day in the year 742 B.C. As he stood in the temple, Isaiah "saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.'" The temple floor shook and he heard the voice of the Lord call and command him to go speak a word of discipline and doom to the people Israel, leaving just "a seed of" future

redemption in the message. Yes, indeed, God was present and Isaiah was involved in that worship service. What a worship service that was!

In fact, this Biblical scene involving God and Isaiah set a standard for most of the order of worship we use. Verses 1-3 in Isaiah 6 are a prelude, call to worship and opening hymn of praise as we have in our bulletin. Our opening hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy," is based on these verses. Verses 4-5, where Isaiah exclaims, "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips," are a prayer of confession of sin as we have in our services each Sunday. Verses 6-7 where the seraph touches Isaiah's mouth with a live coal and declares his guilt and sin gone are an assurance of pardon of sins. We are assured by the words, not live burning coals, thank God. Verses 8-13 where God speaks to Isaiah combine the spoken Word of God, a sermon, a confession of faith and God sending us out into the world to spread his message. This is similar to the middle and later part of our order of worship.

Even though the Bible does not spell out an exact an order of worship, this passage from Isaiah has been used as a standard for worship by some of our Jewish and Roman Catholic brothers and sisters for centuries. John Calvin, one of the Protestant Reformation Leaders in the 1500's, adopted the order of worship we have from a Roman Catholic Mass in Strasburg, France. John Knox, the founder of the Presbyterian Church then adopted it from him. I have been to a Presbyterian worship service in Scotland, an Episcopalian service in England, Roman Catholic and Jewish services in the USA where they used almost the same order of worship. We have a [Book of Common Worship](#) that recommends our format of worship and reflects centuries of worship research.

Again, what is most important about how we worship is that the order of service and the contents within it focuses on; the Triune God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the service, the focus on God is leading us to: praise him; ask for his help; listen to him speak to us in the Written Word and music; experience his forgiveness, and salvation through the Son, Jesus Christ. He expects us to respond to his call by confessing him as Lord and Savior. He then leads us by the Holy Spirit to serve him in this world.

The passage written by the Apostle Paul in our Epistle Lesson today takes us even deeper into this focus of our worship service. Paul lifts up the message God is communicating to us. Fortunately for us, the message for today is much more positive than Isaiah's first assignment of doom and gloom. We are present here today to hear again, how the "seed of" future redemption in the message of Isaiah came to fruition in God in Jesus Christ. Paul reminds us of the good news, which we have received, in which we take our stand of faith, through which we are being saved: "That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures," and that he appeared to over 500 witnesses who then spread the good news to the world.

The core of the good news also includes our being saved by God's transforming grace in Jesus Christ, just as Paul was. Paul wrote that by the transforming grace of God, he became the Christian leader he was. Paul, whose original name was Saul had been a Pharisee who was in charge of persecuting the early Christian church. He was in charge of stoning to death the first Christian martyr,

Stephen. Shortly after this, while on his way to Damascus to murder more Christians, he was transformed by the grace of God. Saul was struck down by a light from heaven and Jesus spoke to him and converted him. He then changed his name to Paul, and was further transformed into the greatest Christian missionary ever.

It is this same grace of God in Jesus Christ that comes from heaven through the scriptures to transform you and me. The Holy Spirit of God whispers this transforming grace, these words of salvation in our ear, lifts them to our eyes and implants them in our hearts. This grace and words are: "The Crucified and Risen Jesus Christ is the Lord and Savior of our lives." We will further experience him in the Eucharist today, the Lord's Supper, where we are reminded: He has forgiven us our sins: He is present with us forever, and will raise us from the dead to be with him in heaven.

In today's scriptures and in the communion service, God calls us, just as he did Isaiah, to be his messengers of his transforming grace, and of his good news in word and deed to everyone in the world. We are then to joyfully respond to this grace by confessing with our mouths and believing in our hearts that God in Jesus Christ is our Crucified and Risen Lord and Savior. Jesus Christ then spends our lifetime transforming us so that we will praise him with our whole lives by sharing this grace by teaching it, and living it out with all of God's creation. This is the focus and the core of a Christian Worship service. This also is the core of the MOPS program in our church.

Also in response to this transforming grace and message of good news, the early Christians decided their Sabbath, their worship of God, would be on a Sunday because that was the day of the week in which Jesus was raised from the dead. So Christians over the centuries have normally worshipped on Sunday. Yet, we can worship and have worshipped God in the Risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ at any hour or any day of the week. Our worship of God never ends. According to the Book of Revelation, it continues on into everlasting life in heaven.

There is song from 1972 written by a Presbyterian Minister, Richard Avery and his organist friend, Donald Marsh that sums up well why we worship the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit as we do. It is called,

"Every Morning is Easter Morning."

Ev'ry morning is Easter morning from now on!

Ev'ry day's resurrection day, the past is over and gone!

1. Good-bye guilt, good-bye fear, good riddance! Hello, Lord, Hello, sun!
I am one of the Easter People! My new life has begun!

Ev'ry morning is Easter morning from now on!

Ev'ry day's resurrection day, the past is over and gone!

2. Daily news is so bad it seems the Good News seldom gets heard.
Get it straight from the Easter People! God's in charge spread the word!

Ev'ry morning is Easter morning from now on!

Ev'ry day's resurrection day, the past is over and gone!

3. Yesterday I was bored and lonely; But today look and see!
I belong to the Easter People! Life's exciting to me!

Ev'ry morning is Easter morning from now on!
Ev'ry day's resurrection day, the past is over and gone!
Ev'ry morning is Easter morning,
Ev'ry morning is Easter morning,
Ev'ry morning is Easter morning,
From—now—on!

Words & Tune: Richard K. Avery and Donald S. Marsh, in the *Avery and Marsh Songbook*,
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