

Fruit of the Spirit: Passionate Worship

Psalm 84

This should have been an easy sermon to write. After all, worship is one of the main reasons we come to church on Sunday mornings. We come to worship. We enter this building. We sit in our pews. We sing songs. We lift up prayers. On Sunday mornings, we worship. Knowing all of that, this should have been an easy sermon to write. But I will tell you that was not the case.

I don't know if it is because worship is a complicated issue nowadays in the church. There is so much talk about styles of worship, Traditional or contemporary, hymns or praise music, Taize or mediation. There is even talk about how worship can be a tool to attract people to a particular church, what is needed to be included in worship to attract the younger generation. Worship has become such a complicated issue for our churches that I think all we have done with our discussions is cloudy the issue and forgotten why we worship God in the first place.

We worship God as people of faith to feel a stronger, greater connection to God. That's it. It really is that simple. We worship God as people of faith to become more connected to the presence of God in our lives.

Worship is more than a building. It is more than a place. It is more than just something we do on Sunday mornings. Worship needs to be, should be for us as people of faith a transforming experience that opens our minds, opens our hearts, opens our very spirits to the presence of God in our lives. Worship needs to be, should be what calls us out of the business of life and into the sacred that gives us life. Worship needs to be, should be the connection that we all long for in our souls. Worship needs to be, should be the connection to God that makes us whole.

Worship is worship is worship, no matter the style.

What matters to us as people of faith in spite of all our conversations about worship is exploring how we cultivate this sense of the sacred in our lives.

Let me explain: We commonly use the word “liturgy” to describe what we do in worship. This word “Liturgy” comes from two Greek words that have been translated over the years as “the Work of the people”. The prayers that we say. The songs that we sing. The very order of our worship is liturgy. It is our work as people of faith.

Now, I’m not talking about work as in a chore but work rather as a discipline. It is through the work of the liturgy that we make our faith concrete. It is in worship that we hear the many names for God and we find the image for God that resonates with us and sparks our faith. It is in worship that we do theology, in

that we struggle, celebrate, and praise our God while trying to develop a language that captures our beliefs, our experiences, our understandings of God. It is through the work of worship that we hear the Word of God for the people of God and discern what God is calling us to do, what God is calling us to be as a follower of God.

It is through the work of worship that our faith becomes concrete, becomes alive, becomes something more than just an ideal that we try to live out in our lives. It is through the work of worship that our faith becomes reality.

The problem has come in that we think because we do this work, we own this work, that we own worship. That's why there have been so many debates on what style of worship works best. Each group who loves a particular style thinks they have the answer, that their style is the one style that will ultimately win the worship wars and provide the people of God with the best experience with the presence of God. As I said before, it is because of these certain worship conversations that I say we've gotten away from the purpose of our worship.

Worship is worship, is worship, no matter the style. Now, do I think some worship services are done better than others? Yes. I think we run a risk as people of faith of letting what we do on Sunday mornings become routine, become mundane, become just motions that we go through because we have always done

them that way. I think what sets some worship services apart from others, regardless of style, is that it is a real authentic expression of faith that captures and cultivates the joy and delight, the peace and comfort of being in the presence of God. Can this happen through silence? Yes. Can this happen through organ music? Yes. Can this happen through praise choruses? Yes.

Worship needs to be about God, and only about God. The reality of it is We don't own worship. Worship is not about our needs or wants. Worship isn't about screens or projectors. Worship isn't about hymnals or organ.

Don't get me wrong. I like all those things and I believe that all those things can be used to create a moving experience for us as people of faith. I just think it is time we realize that worship is not about us. Worship is about our God.

You see, through worship, God transforms lives, heals wounded souls, renews hope, shapes decisions, provokes change, inspires compassion, and binds people to one another. Through worship, God sustains a relationship with the people of God.

Think and remember our Bible stories. Each and every time, someone encountered the presence of God, he or she fell down and worshipped God. We aren't told that Abraham pulled out his hymnal and turned to page 100 before he worshipped God. No, we are told God spoke to Abraham and Abraham

worshipped God. Moses didn't pull out his electric guitar and sing praise choruses when he encountered the burning bush. No he encountered the presence of God, realized he was on holy ground, and worshipped his God.

Worship, no matter what the style, worship is supposed to connect us with the presence of God. God through worship builds a relationship with us as God's people and through the work of worship equips us to be the people God created us to be.

God sustains a relationship with the people of God through worship. It is through worship that we come to know God more fully, more completely. It is through worship that we encounter the mystery and sacredness of God, and realize that we too are invited to become part of that mystery and holiness.

You see, in reality, the work of worship is an invitation to all of us as the people of God to enter into the story of God, a story that is still unfolding in our world, a story that still transforming our world. The work of worship is to connect us to the presence of God that surrounds us each and every day.

So maybe the better translation for the word "liturgy" is "the work for the people." This way, we don't get confused on who is actually doing the work of transformation, the work of bringing about the Kingdom of God here on earth. God

is and we are just invited to come along for the ride, because what a strange and glorious ride it is!

Once we realize that we don't own worship but instead, worship is a way for us as the people of God to strengthen our connection to God, our worship, our liturgy then becomes the avenues for us to share the story of God's grace, the story of God's love here on earth with all of God's people.

Our worship, our liturgy then become ways to rehearse our lives as people of faith, loves of love, joy, patience, peace, kindness, gentleness, generosity and self-control. Our worship then becomes not only about us and meeting our own spiritual needs but also becomes an invitation to be changed, to be fashioned into instruments of hope and mercy that God uses to transform the world.

Worship is not about us. Worship is about praising our God, celebrating our God, being in conversation with God, bringing our hopes and hurts before God, bringing our dreams and disappointments before God. Worship is about finding out that God is still writing the story of God's people, and we have been invited to participate in that story.

You see, the thing we tend to forget is that each and every Sunday is a "small" Easter. Even during Lent, when we are talking about our journey with Jesus to the cross, even during Lent, we are reminded through our worship, that

God, that love has the last word. On Sundays, every Sunday, through worship, we lift up our broken and sacred halleluiah and remember that our God is still working in this world to bring healing and wholeness to all of God's people.

Because you see, When we worship as a community of faith, as people of God, we are publicly claiming and proclaiming God's love and God's grace, not just for ourselves, although, we too need to hear about these things. We are also proclaiming these things for others as well. When we worship, we are proclaiming to this world that there is another way.

The most radical thing we can do as people of faith is worship our God. This is what sets the church apart from community clubs like the Kiwanis or Lions Clubs who like communities of faith, do good deeds and community outreach. The most radical thing we can do as people of faith is worship our God. Because through our worship, we are publicly claiming and proclaiming God's welcome for all of God's people, to come find grace and love because all are created in the image of God, because all are claimed and named as Beloved Children of God. Through our worship, we are reminded that the "words we say, the words of prayer, sermon words, hymn words, words of praise and penitence, these words, these signs and symbols used in our worship, become signs and symbols of our connection to God. they become like stones thrown into the pond; they ripple out-

words in countless concentric circles, finding ever fresh expression in new places in our lives, finding new ways to bring healing and wholeness for all of God's people.

That's why the places where we worship are called "sanctuaries". It doesn't matter how elaborate or how simple these spaces may be, they are still our sanctuaries. They are our places where God calls us out of the business of life to connect to the presence of God. Our sanctuaries are our spaces where worship isn't merely an obligation to be filled but rather a space where we can come to know God, experience God, where we can come to be invited to participate in the work of God for the people of God. Our sanctuaries are where God transforms lives, heals wounds, renews hope, shapes decisions, provokes change, inspires compassion, and binds us to one another as brothers and sisters in faith.

But just as the psalmist discovers in Psalm 84, God's presence is not limited to a building. It is not limited to a particular space. God's presence is all around us and most importantly in us as well, making us as the people of God, sanctuaries for a hurting and broken world. We are called to be what connects the sacred to the ordinary for a world that is need of good news. God's sanctuary, the place where the sacred connects with the ordinary, is in the hearts and lives of the transformed people of God. It is through our worship that we become sanctuaries, become the

dwelling place of God for all of the people of God, bringing healing and wholeness for all of God's creation.

Worship is worship is worship, no matter the style. But I'm going to tell you, a little secret. No matter how good the preacher is, no matter how good the music is, and more importantly, no matter how good the communion bread is, once we leave these four walls, once we leave this sanctuary, it is up to us to continue being the dwelling place of God for the people of God.

No one can do this hard work for us. It is part of our vocation as children of God. It is part of the journey. It is part of the joy we get to experience by being in a relationship with God. We short change ourselves if we only rely on someone else to tell us how and when to experience God. We short change ourselves if we think only one style of worship will create a transforming experience for us.

As we start to rethink why we are here for worship, and as we start to reclaim our joy, reclaim our delight, as we start to think of our worship as not as our work but an invitation to participate in the work of God, we realize that really everything we do, from the words that we say, to our interactions with others, can be and is worship to God.

So this week, I want to challenge all of us to think about our earliest memories of worship, think about what causes us delight, creates joy in our lives.

This week, I want to challenge all of us to think about the many ways we can and do worship our God.

Because you see once we remember why we worship, once we remember the purpose of our worship, once we accept the invitation to work for the people, we realize that we will never be the same. Because in that moment, we begin to realize that our worship, beyond just filling our spiritual needs, it keeps us aware that our true house is not a house of fear in which the powers of hate and violence rule. But instead, our worship makes us aware that we are called to reside always in the house of love where God resides. And just like the psalmist, when we reside in the house of God, the house of love, we soon discover that one day in the house of the Lord is better than a thousand elsewhere.

May we passionately worship our God with thanksgiving and praise and may the fruits of our worship bring healing and wholeness for all of God's creation. Amen.