

Sermon:**Sunday May 9, 2010 – Christian Family Sunday/Mother’s Day****JIM SHORT Ladner United Church 0900and 1100hrs**

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SCRIPTURE LESSON for Sunday May 9, 2010

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Our first lesson is from the Book of Revelation:

N. T Wright in his book – Simply Christian suggests that these verses from the New Testament Book of Revelation are a good starting point to understand what Christian worship is.

John the “seer” is describing a vision he himself has seen. He is a kind of fly upon the wall of heaven, peeping into the very throne room of God. We, watching the scene through John’s eyes are eavesdropping on it second hand.

The scene tells us a great deal about worshipping the one true God.

What John is suggesting is that in heaven worship takes place 7 and 24 – all the time and there are times when the boundary between God’s sphere and ours is like a thin partition - a curtain pulled back so that people in our dimension can see, experience and feel what is going on in God’s dimension and how those two realities are connected.

Look beyond those modern questions we like to ask - did it really happen this way? Do not worry about what this or that reference particularly means. Worship is not an intellectual activity but rather a soaking of our whole being in God’s grace and love - soak yourself in the imagery, listen – and lose yourself in the beauty, the wonder and the mystery of John’s magnificent vision.

This is worship. (pps. 143-144) (Pause)

Reading from the Book of Revelation, chapters 4 and 5, selected verses: (pause)

¹After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." ²At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it... A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. ⁴Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. ⁵From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits^[a] of God. ⁶Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. ⁷The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. ⁸Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." ⁹Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to God who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, ¹⁰the twenty-four elders fall down before God who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

¹¹"You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created
and have their being."

¹¹Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. ¹²In a loud voice they sang:
"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!"

¹³Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing:
"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power,
for ever and ever!" ¹⁴The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Thus ends the first lesson.

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Our gospel lesson is taken from Luke:

Outside of the Great Temple in Jerusalem, worship took places in synagogues or meeting houses.

It was the custom in the Jewish synagogues of the 1st century to ask a visiting rabbi to teach from the scriptures.

After making an initial tour of Galilee, Jesus went to worship on the Sabbath. He was asked to read and interpret a passage of scripture. He chose or was assigned a passage from Isaiah 61 which was to become the model for his ministry.

Then he declared to the congregation that this prophecy was being fulfilled in their hearing.

From this passage and others, the present disciple community has discerned God’s “preferential option for the poor” and the cause of social justice for the most vulnerable in our society.

While not as magnificent or awe inspiring as the description of worship in the book of revelation, this passage reminds us that worship is always linked to our very real lives, our concerns and that of the world we live in. **(pause)**

Reading from Chapter 4, verses 14-30: **(pause)**

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

¹⁶He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. ¹⁷The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²⁰Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, ²¹and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Here ends the second lesson.

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Along with the scriptures, in preparation for the sermon time, please turn in your Voices United Hymn Books to page 918 and we will say together the words of the New Creed (give people time to find the reference in the hymn book)

Let us repeat together:

We are not alone,
we live in God's world.

We believe in God:
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus,
the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others
by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.
We are not alone.
Thanks be to God.

One: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

Many: Thanks be to God.

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May the meditations of our hearts and the words of my lips if they be your words be worthy and acceptable unto you and may your word come to your people know either through me or despite me. In Jesus name, amen.

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We are called to be the Church... and the first thing we are called to do is - to celebrate God's presence...

Worship...

As we associate wrongly "building" with the word church – the first place we usually go with worship is the Sunday service

So much so that if I encounter someone from our church community who we've not seen around for a while...

Or I may not have seen them...

They immediately look uncomfortable...

Look at the floor or sky...hummm and haw...

And begin to make excuses for not being at Sunday worship...

To talk about worship today...let's push the traditional Sunday at 900 or 1100am service for a moment and put it on the shelf...

Look at the movement of the Creed...

We are called...

God's initiative – it doesn't begin with us...

It begins with the Creator YHWH who made us and all of this beautiful world in the Creator's image...the Creator loves it passionately and desires a relationship with us...

The Creator YHAH has become fully human and present to the Creation – the world – you and me in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus

And who continues even now to abide with us...through the ongoing presence of the Spirit...

And the Creator YHWH calls us...

To be the church – (not the building) – it does not say we are called to be the building...

The ecclesia – the gathered community...and the very first thing we are to do before we do anything is to worship...

To celebrate God's presence...

What does it mean to celebrate God's presence...?

If I celebrate someone's presence – I enjoy them...I want to be aware of them, to know about them, to have a relationship with them...

When our son Nick comes to visit – after having moved to Vancouver – we celebrate his presence with us...

We are happy

Joyful

Warmed...

Cathy will often say if we've not seen Nick for a while that she has a heart ache – a kind of a hole in heart that only seeing and hugging Nick will fill...longing to see him...

It's not the knowledge of Nick that is the issue – we know all kinds of things about Nick

We have pictures – we have things of his going back for years – but rather it's the relationship we long for...

...his voice, his touch, his smell, his being...his words and ways...

And so at the heart of "Christian Worship" is the longing that God has for us – John – for God so loved the world

And the longing and deep need we have – our kind of spiritual DNA – for relationship with God...

And so Christian worship is an attitude of openness and expectation where we place ourselves – prepare our selves – train our selves to be attuned to God – so that when God comes along – we notice...

We give our time, our energy, and our gifts to being attentive knowing that “Christian worship” nurtures that relationship with God...

I can read about God, talk about God, and do things for God – but unless I “worship” I will not have a relationship with God...

R. J Foster in his book – Celebration of Discipline says worship is about “spirit touching spirit”

God’s touching spirit touching our spirit...

To worship means to give our “worth” ship – our very best to someone

NT Wright (Simply Christian – which will be our Study Program for this fall)

Two immutable laws:

- each of us will give our “worth” ship to something
- that will determine the kind of human being we are

And that act/acts of “worth” ship – even if we do not realize it...will shape us and give us fruit:

What we worship helps us answer the big questions of human existence...

One of the immutable laws of life is that we become what we worship...

And we see all of life – what we do etc through what we give our worship to

Because without realizing it – it shapes us

Marva Dawn:

A Royal Waste of Time p. 22

- identity – who am I?
- loyalty – to whom do I belong?
- values – how shall I love?
- power – how will I make my way in life?
- a story – how does it fit together?
- meaning – how shall I live?
- hope – what is the future?

We will all worship someone or something – and that will make a difference between life and death...

Marvelous scene in the Alistair Simms movie – A Christmas Carol – near the end – Bob Cratchet does not yet know the transformation that Ebenezer Scrooge has undergone – comes back the day after Christmas and he is late...

All through the movie – solitary Mr. Scrooge – worshipping his money – lovingly counting it, hoarding it – it bringing him and others no joy...

Slips in the door – late – Pardon me Mr. Scrooge – I know I am late – it won’t happen again – but yesterday – my family and I we were making quite merry...

Christianity for the Rest of Us

Diana Butler Bass

P 174

The object of worship is not to create anything. The goal is simply to invite people into a sense of attentiveness and openness.

When people are asked to identify if they are a Christian – or what a Christian is or isn't

- they are quick to talk about what they know or don't know
- what they believe or don't believe in terms of doctrine
- what they do for God or don't do in terms of morality

Notice again – where the New Creed begins – before it says anything about what we do – that comes in the next lines

We are called to worship – to celebrate – to be aware, attentive, attuned...to give ourselves to God in celebration...

Think of a time, an experience, an encounter, a moment...

When you felt connected to God

You were overwhelmed with God's presence

You were opened up

You were touched

Long or short time – clear or fleeting – it might be like the flutter of a butterfly's wings or the slow gradual unfolding of a flower – it might feel like a quick kiss or a long embrace...

Your heart as John Wesley says was "strangely warmed" and someone you felt in your being connected and certain of God's presence...

That is worship

I was talking with someone this week...who said

Jim – I get up in the morning...I sit at my kitchen table and I look out into the sky,

I see the garden and the things that grow...

The clouds,

The birds

And at times all I can do is – look up and say Thanks – that is worship at its very core and heart...

Worship is both memorable and routine...

I can remember a number of times over my life when I have eaten some really incredible meals and I could recall a number of them to you...when I was in Ottawa Cathy and I went and ate at a restaurant called 18 – where her niece Miranda and her husband to be Nick are having their wedding reception and I had the most incredibly cooked ribs I ever had...

And I ate 12 other suppers on that trip and I don't remember them particularly and could not recount them to you in any detail...

But it would have been clear to me that I had not eaten them even if I can't remember what they served – because I would have been hungry...worship is like that...

Worship has two movements – personnel and corporate:

It's something you and I do

Barbara Brown Taylor, an American Episcopal Minister who know teachers wrote a incredible book last year: An Altar in the World (page XIV)

It's about worship – she talks about both the incredible hunger people have in our world for spirituality and the incredible lengths people will go – in essence becoming consumers of spirituality to fill that longing:

Books, Courses, money, retreats, items, fads that come and go, mission trips, pilgrimages

It's about this longing we all have: ironic in a world where we all have so much and pursue such bizarre things

"For more meaning, more feeling, more connection, more life...they want to know there is more to life than what meets the eye..."

And

"The last place most people look is right under their feet, in the everyday activates, accidents and encounters of their lives...the treasure we seek requires no lengthy expedition, no expensive equipment, no superior aptitude or special company."

Engaging the most ordinary routine activities with the most exquisite attention I could give them

Became fully human – trust that there is no way to God apart from real life in the real world

Various simple practices:

There are so simple you could read the book and say – I could have written that...

Waking up to God

Praying attention

Walking the earth

Practice getting lost

Encountering others

Living with a purpose

Practicing Sabbath and saying no

Physical labor

Feeling pain

Prayer – being present to God...

Develop some practices that wake us up....

I love this quote describing her practice of worship on a daily basis... – The Altar of the World – page 180

...I go on nudging at God's breast, letting the smell of that sweet milk lead me deeper into the ordinary activities of my every day."

Each of us has practices – we may not though understand them as part of our worship:

I have a number:

- I have a "three things I am thankful for" prayer I do at times during the day – often at night
- I engage in occasional journaling using both written word and pictures
- I love to read all kinds of things
- I develop small mission statements and mantras for myself
- I find music; art and candles remind me of holy time
- I have various symbols and kinds of altars which keep me grounded...

What times, places, activities and items help you worship?

The whole world is God's home and as is each moment of life – worship helps us savor all of it and see God in it...

And because we are all different creatures – reflecting the beauty of diversity – there is not just one way for us to worship...in his book

Rick Warren – The Purpose filled Life – page 103

He identifies the Nine ways people draw close to God (all of us are perhaps predominately one – or perhaps two of these directions with a smattering one others)

He identifies:

Naturalists – see God in the outdoors

Sensate – love God with their senses and appreciate beautiful worships services that involve sight, taste, smell and touch

Traditionalist – draw close to God through rituals, liturgies, symbols and unchanging structures

Ascetics – prefer God in simplicity and solicitude

Activists love God through confronting evil, battling injustice and working to make the world a better place

Enthusiasts love God through celebration

Contemplatives love God through adoration

Intellectuals love God by studying with their minds

There is no "one size fits all" approach to worship and friendship with God...

And there is an important place for worship

With others...

Where two or three are gathered in my name – there I am among you – in Jesus'

Life – scripture this morning – worship that was private, personal and with others – both in a small group and formal service in the synagogue

NT Wright – Simply Christian – that formal church worship is

"The call to worship God is rather like the order that goes out from a dictator whose subjects may not like him but have learned to fear him. He wants a hundred thousand people to line the route for his birthday parade. Very well, he shall have them and they will all be cheering and waving as if their lives depended on it- because in fact, they do. Turn away in boredom or don't turn up at all and it will be worse for you."

Rituals, times, ceremonies, gathering with us others give us the balance between the individual relationship and the corporate...

God calls the church...

We have to be careful to not approach this corporate worship like consumers...

Yes it should not be boring or irrelevant or sloppy – after all we are giving our best to God...

But its not about our taste...worship should be
Inclusive

Sincere

Formative

Comforting

Challenging

Well thought out and planned...

Grounded in tradition and open to new ways of expression

But it is not about what we like and don't like – its not entertainment and we say

That the "liturgy" – what we do on Sundays – is the work of the people...

Its wrong – to leave if it is not working or to stay away because we like this or don't like that...

Since it is your work –

Work together to make it so...

We come to each new day – as individuals and as a church

Made in the image of God – loved unconditionally

Gift and strengths

Sins and the thoughts, words and deeds that separate us from God

Brokenness, wounds, heart aches...

In "worship"

Marva Dawn – A Royal Waste of Time (pps. 2-3)

"To worship God – in the world's eyes – a waste of time. By engaging in it we accomplish nothing useful in our society's terms...it's purpose is not to gain numbers for our churches to be seen as successful...moreover, it is even useful for earning points with God...what we do in worship won't change one whit how God feels about us...we will always be helpless sinners caught in our endless inability to be what we should be or to make ourselves better – and God will always be merciful, compassionate and gracious, abounding in steadfast love and ready to forgive as we come to God....worship immerses us in the splendor of God of the cosmos...as a result (of this waste of time) we will be changed – but not because of anything we do...God on whom we are centered and to whom we submit will transform us...Worship of such a God immerses us in such a way of life, empowered by a Spirit who does not equip us with means of power or control accomplishment or success, but with the ability and humility to waste time in the love of the neighbor..."

Image:

Like the heritage house – and we come seeking renovation, retrofitting, and restoration as God's beloved people

Mother's Day began as I have emailed and put in the bulletin as a protest against war and human carnage caused by it
War

People often ask me about Afghanistan

Is it right or wrong what we are doing there – should we be there

I can do the pros and cons...but this week I was reminded – it's deeper than that – it has to do with what we worship in this world

And if we worship – power, money, might, war, the military industrial complex violence – why should we then be surprised that our world has been shaped and formed and us with in by these idols...

It matters what we worship – Barbara Brown Taylor in her book I referred to earlier quotes:

Jonathan Swift

"We have just enough `religion' to make us hate one another...but not enough to make us love one another."

Its time to re think who it is we love with all of our hearts and minds and body and strength....