

The Whys of Worship: What Christians do on Sundays and why we do it.

Class #1: January 7, 2018: The Purpose of Worship

The Purpose of Worship is to glorify God.

We come with lots of different experiences and expectations of church, but we are off track unless God is at the center of our attention as we plan and engage in worship.

“In corporate worship, we unite ourselves with others to acknowledge the holiness of God, to hear God’s Word, to offer prayer, and to celebrate the sacraments.” (*Book of Common Prayer*, p.857)

Worship is first of all directed toward God (praise, thanks, adoration, listening, offering ourselves to God). We offer ourselves to God, and we pray for ourselves and others, but God is primary in our attention.

Worship on Sundays is corporate worship: the gathering of the Christian Community to worship God together. So part of worship is the sharing of God’s grace together. Yet still, the focus is sharing God’s grace, not focusing on ourselves alone.

That’s why:

Because our focus is on God, we begin worship by praising God with a hymn, invoking God’s name: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and asking God to purify our hearts for worship (“the collect for purity”). See BCP, p.355

If the service were catered to the individual, we would have chaos in our worship. Just read 1 Corinthians in the Bible. Paul encouraged them to be unified, most especially as they gathered for worship. To provide a way for everyone to participate, our prayers are less individualized, and rather offered as a group.

That’s why:

We use a Book of Common Prayer so that our worship is not worship by one person, or by scattered individuals, but *worship expressed by a group of people ‘in common’ with each other*. With written or learned prayers, we can join in praying to God *together* as a body (“corporate” worship).

Because we live so much of our lives in the secular world, it is easy for the church to become like a secular institution, and focus more on us (like a club) than on God. So we should think carefully about how we worship God and what we include. We use only the Bible, and we focus our preaching on the Biblical readings and our prayers and hymns rely heavily on the language of scripture. The Eucharist is the central feast of the church so that what Jesus did (and does) is more important than what we do.

Examples where worship goes off track of its purpose:

- The “me” church (top priority: what do “I” get out of it? does it feed “me?”)
- Entertainment (focused on the priest or the sermon, choir, kids, etc)
- Club (all about us, all about social life only, all about insiders, or us vs. those down the street)
- Secular focus (only politics—left or right, only social work, or random intellectual pursuits)
- Only for part of the church (adults only, kids only, clergy only, members only, families only...)

Goals of this class: You will learn...

1. To place a priority on God in worship,
2. To understand why we do what we do,
3. A vocabulary for discussing worship & liturgy,
4. To understand different approaches to worship and differing expectations of worship,
5. To use the Book of Common Prayer and understand other rites of the church.

Next week: What do you expect? Competing assumptions about Christian worship

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