

A People Who Worship

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

2nd in a three-part series

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Psalm 100 (NRSV)

- ¹ Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.
² Worship the LORD with gladness;
 come into his presence with singing.
³ Know that the LORD is God.
 It is he that made us, and we are his;
 we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
 and his courts with praise.
 Give thanks to him, bless his name.
⁵ For the LORD is good;
 his steadfast love endures forever,
 and his faithfulness to all generations.

Joel 2:16 (CEB)

- ¹⁶ Gather the people;
 prepare a holy meeting;
 assemble the elders;
 gather the children,
 even nursing infants.
Let the groom leave his room
 and the bride her chamber.

John 4:19–26 (CEB)

- ¹⁹ The woman said, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you and your people say that it is necessary to worship in Jerusalem.”
²¹ Jesus said to her, “Believe me, woman, the time is coming when you and your people will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You and your people worship what you don’t know; we worship what we know because salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the time is coming—and is here!—when true worshippers will worship in spirit and truth. The Father looks for those who worship him this way. ²⁴ God is spirit, and it is necessary to worship God in spirit and truth.”
²⁵ The woman said, “I know that the Messiah is coming, the one who is called the Christ. When he comes, he will teach everything to us.”
²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I Am—the one who speaks with you.”

The need to worship is woven right into us, into all people. As John Calvin put it, we are idol factories. We will worship; the only question is what or whom. And importantly, with whom?

Last week, we began this series on *Starting Point*, our three-session introduction to St. Andrew. And we started where we should have – with Jesus. This week, we move on to talk about worship, Christian worship, our *communal worship*. Churches are filled with activities of one sort or another. We teach, we care, we feed, we clothe, we provide fellowship, and so on. But many organizations do such things. The one thing we do that is that is distinctly and uniquely Christian is to worship our Lord . . . Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our worship defines us. It sets apart us apart from the world. It infuses all we do. And of all the ways in which we worship, none is so important as worshipping together, as God’s gathered people.

But we begin with a woman who knows none of this.

In today’s story from John 4, Jesus talks about worship with a Samaritan woman he meets at noon at her village’s well. Though no one outside the village would know why the woman is there at noon, an unusual time, Jesus knows and we too soon learn the

truth. She has had five husbands and is currently living with a man to whom she is not even married. She comes to the well at noon to avoid the smirks and snickers of the other women in the village. She lives a lonely life, socially cut-off in a world driven by family and community.

She quickly gets over her astonishment that Jesus knows the truth and, not surprisingly, tries to change the subject. Isn't that so like us all. When we get close to the heart of a difficult matter, when we begin talking about something that makes us uncomfortable, we try to shift the conversation elsewhere.

So the woman changes the subject to worship, especially the "where" of worship. I guess that shouldn't surprise us either. We can get pretty caught up in the importance

Old Hundredth

Psalm 100 is one of the most familiar of the psalms, perhaps second only to the 23rd. The psalm is brief and its message is simple: *God is good and we are his.*

A version of Psalm 100 was set to music nearly 450 years ago by William Kethe, a friend of John Knox, the great reformer. The tune was composed by Louis Bourgeois, who composed for John Calvin. The tune became known as *Old Hundredth* after Psalm 100, even though Bourgeois first composed it as a tune for a paraphrase of Psalm 134. Many congregations now sing *Old Hundredth* as the doxology (lit., "the word of glory and praise") each week during worship services. The original Kethe/Bourgeois hymn is #75 in the UMC Hymnal, "All People That on Earth Do Dwell." The *Old Hundredth* doxology is #95 in our hymnal.¹

It goes against our grain to proclaim that we belong to God, that God has purchased us at an incalculable price, as the apostle Paul put it. Yet, "we are his" – all we are, all we have. My life is not my own. I am not free so that I can do anything with my life that I choose. I am free so that I may live my life as God created me to live it – loving him and loving neighbor.

There is no part of us that is not God's. Were God not good, then belonging lock-stock-and-barrel to God wouldn't be joyful. But God *is* good. God defines good. Thus, we can be thankful that not only are we God's, but that we know God. We know our LORD. We have much to be thankful for, much to remember, when we gather to worship as St. Andrew, but, foremost, we are thankful that we are God's – his people and the sheep of his pasture.

1. from J. Clinton McCann Jr.'s commentary on the Psalms in *The New Interpreter's Bible*. This commentary set is available in the St. Andrew library.

of this spot of land or that one, in one building or another. Certainly, Jesus' fellow Jews were often so focused on the importance of "The Land," that they failed to see God's work in all the world. Jesus tries to help her see that worship is not really about the "where" but the "who." What matters is not where the woman worships, on the mountain or in Jerusalem, but that she worships the true God. And as we learn in John's gospel, God is revealed fully only in Jesus Christ.

What or whom?

Worship is hardwired into us. Our deepest self feels this urge, this need to worship. Thus, the question isn't really whether we worship, but only what or whom we worship. Will we worship our ancestors or nature or our jobs or a sports hero or wealth or sex? You get my point. N. T. Wright rightly takes this a step further when he says that we become what we worship. Worship money and we become greedy. Worship sex and we become lustful. . . . But worship the LORD God, our creator and redeemer, and we become Christlike. That is simply how it works.

It is easy for us to think of worship only as something we all gather for once each week. We pray, sing hymns, hear a sermon, and so on. Then we return a week later for another worship service and do it all again. But our growth as the covenant people of God will not come merely through a one-hour shot in the arm each week. There is more, but there is certainly not less.

As the above passage from the Gospel of John shows and as evidenced in Psalm 100, God actively seeks worshipers. God wants a relationship with us and our acknowledgement of his glory and worth. Worship is a vital means by which we grow as God's people and enrich our lives with

each other as well as with God.

Bringing back together the who and the with whom

We are made for the worship of the LORD God, revealed in Jesus Christ. And, as Simon Chan writes, “God made the world in order to make the church.” The church does not consist of buildings, not even the beautiful sanctuaries such as our own. Rather, the church consists of all those who have faith in Jesus Christ. When we rise each week to recite together the Apostles Creed and affirm our belief in “one holy catholic church,” we mean the universal church, the body of Christ – to which all Christians, all those who have faith in Jesus Christ, belong. God had once dwelt in the temple of Jerusalem, but, beginning at Pentecost, God dwells in and among his people. It is the people of God themselves who are joined together in Christ, a new creation and new humanity, growing into a holy temple, the temple to which God has returned. What a remarkable claim we make, that God’s very presence dwells in us, the church -- the people of God.

The idea of a Christian who doesn’t worship regularly with other believers is self-contradictory. Worshiping together is what we do. As I said earlier, communal worship is the only thing we do that we cannot do apart from our fellowship. Lots of charities feed, clothe, counsel, and offer medical care. There are countless places to have your children looked after or even to educate them. But worshipping together – that is uniquely ours.

For more than twenty years, there has been a congregation called St. Andrew in the holy, universal church. We have been on a journey, understanding that God created us to be his. We are a large community and we have all the blessings and challenges that come with size, but we must never lose sight of the fact that we are not merely an organization. Rather, we, as the body of Christ, are the very presence of Christ.

We are a growing and dynamic community of faith, marked by a welcoming warmth that we cherish and nurture and by a commitment to communal worship, in its many forms. The larger church and our small part of it is the place of hope and joy we all seek, because we know whom we are to worship . . . and with whom.

St. Andrew’s **Starting Point** Program

Starting Point is the fastest way to get connected into deeper fellowship and growth here at St. Andrew. Through three dynamic sessions, **Discover St. Andrew, Get Connected**, and **Make an Impact**, you will have the opportunity to tour the church campus, meet key staff members, connect with some of our current members, and ask questions about our ministries and programs. This series of classes is held monthly at 9:30 a.m. in room 131. Go to www.standrewumc.org/starting-point for more information.

DISCOVER ST. ANDREW

This class provides newcomers and prospective members with a sense for what St. Andrew is all about. It covers the **vision and core values** of the church, as well as fundamentals of the faith and the basic disciplines needed for spiritual growth.

GET CONNECTED

This class covers everything you need to **grow in community**. It covers the biblical call to include other believers in our walk with God. It also provides opportunities to get plugged into a small group at St. Andrew where people experience growth through authentic, godly relationships. This matches our ministry strategy of Worship and Connect.

MAKE AN IMPACT

This class teaches how you can **serve and give with impact**. It includes biblical principles of using your time, talent, and treasures to intentionally serve the church and those around you, and provides opportunities to begin serving. It also discusses how to use your unique abilities to influence the Kingdom and lead others on a journey with Christ. In addition, an opportunity for membership will be provided. This matches our ministry strategies of Serve and Give.

N. T. Wright on Worship and Wholeness

Bishop N.T. Wright, currently at St. Andrews University in Scotland, is not only one of the foremost New Testament scholars of his generation, but he has also spent considerable time in his career as a working pastor, leading worship, preaching, and providing pastoral direction. The following are some of his reflections on worship and its God-given role in helping us all to be more whole persons living in community within God's creation.

Christian worship ought to bring together the often disjointed aspects of our human life, integrating the whole person, the whole community, and the whole creation.

First, the whole person. Loving God, as the *Shema* [the Jewish prayer that begins with Deuteronomy 6:4] insists, with heart, mind, soul, and strength means loving God as integrated human beings. Each of us, no doubt, is tempted to advance on one of these fronts ahead of the others; growing to maturity means learning how to keep them all in balance. This, again, is where some branches of Protestantism have made mistakes in one direction, just as some parts of Catholicism have made mistakes in others. The danger of gnosticism is never far away from many parts of Protestantism: that is, the danger of a dualism in which the created order, including our own bodies, is regarded as dangerous or second-rate, so that worship must renounce our embodiedness, our belonging within the created world of space, time, and matter, rather than reaffirming and redeeming it. If we follow the biblical pattern at this point, we will find our way through various pairs of opposites. There are the ugly sisters of formalism and informality, to which I shall return; or the twin evils of control and chaos, with some churches having everything nailed down into place so that the Spirit is effectively locked out, and others — like the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 14 — so spontaneous and ill-disciplined as to threaten the gospel by their structure as much as their content. Or, again, the twin evils of ritualism and anti-ritualism, the first perverting the liturgy of response into a magical rite designed to manipulate God, the second throwing out the baby of true liturgy with the bathwater of pagan superstition. Ultimately, being human means, both now and in the age to come (i.e., in the resurrection), being *embodied*. Good liturgy celebrates that embodiedness and takes it seriously. Just because liturgy can be abused there is no reason not to do it, any more than we would forbid marriage just because sex can be abused.

Worship also integrates the whole community. That is Paul's point in Romans 15, with Jew and Gentile coming together to worship the one God, fulfilling the central Jewish prayer, YHWH our God, YHWH is one (see 3:27-31). In Galatians 3, Paul echoes the standard synagogue prayer in which the congregation thanks God for being made Jewish, free, and male, by saying that there is now neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, no "male and female." In Christian worship, if it is true Christian worship, all those who name the name of Christ belong together, at the same table, saying the same words. Again, good liturgy is designed to make that happen in reality. Such liturgy ought to be in itself part of the ecumenical endeavor as we put back together the shattered fragments of the body of Christ.

And worship, as we saw in Revelation but also in Romans 8, is designed to unite the whole creation. True worship is not world-denying but world-changing. We proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, heralding him as the Lord of the world, and as we do so, the world becomes a different place. It may not look like it all at once, but that is what worship accomplishes. One day, when God gives us our resurrection bodies and then and thereby gives freedom and new life to the whole creation (Romans 8:18-25), our present acts of faithful responsive worship will be seen as stepping-stones on the way to the final "Amen" from the four beasts [of Revelation]. If that is so, we should be looking for signs and ways in which, in the present, we can anticipate that eventual future. The most obvious such ways are in the sacraments and in our political life, in which we are commanded, invited, urged, and encouraged to celebrate the lordship of Jesus Christ over the whole creation, in anticipation of the day when at his name every knee shall bow (Romans 14:11; Phillipians 2:10).

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. A memorable article in a Christian magazine had a provocative title: “Worshipping the Lamb or Entertaining the Sheep?” Do you think we tend to come to church expecting to be entertained? What do you think is most important in a worship service? What would you like to see changed about our services at St. Andrew? What do you think God would like to see changed? What can we do to help ensure that our focus is on the true worship of God?
2. You might reflect on exactly whom it is we worship. If we become what or whom we worship, how do we know that we are truly worshipping the true God? What in our lives competes for our worship? Why is it so important that we worship together?
3. St. Andrew is, before all else, a worshipping community. All else we do has to flow outward from there. Do you agree? Why might this be so? How does worship strengthen and encourage all the other work we do, as well as the fellowship we enjoy with one another? You might reflect upon the ways in which you have been blessed by God and by St. Andrew. Specifically, where at St. Andrew have you found real joy? What people here make you joyful? What is it about them? You might share some stories about the most meaningful and memorable experiences you’ve had at St. Andrew or with other members of the St. Andrew family.

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Monday, Romans 12:1-2 How should this passage inform our understanding of worship?</p>	<p>Tuesday, Romans 15:7-13 The Christ whom we worship is the hope of all the nations.</p>
<p>Wednesday, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 All creation worships not only God, but also the Lamb.</p>	<p>Thursday, Ephesians 1:3-21 This passage is rooted in Jewish worship and tells the story of what God has done in creation.</p>
<p>Friday, Revelation 4 All the elders and the cherubim kneel in worship before God.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Weekly Joys and Concerns</p>

