

The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, July 30, 2017
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[Matthew 15: \(10-20\), 21-28](#) – **WHY WORSHIP**

Have you ever wondered why you do the things you do...follow the routines by which you live...continue the habits, which you've formed over the years...?

I was thinking about questions like that a few weeks ago as I was driving to church...thinking about why I, on a pretty regular basis, set aside an hour or two most every Sunday to do something very much out of the ordinary...at least as it compares to the rest of my week

I contemplate ancient texts, sing songs with others, repeat well-known phrases, and participate in a tradition which hearkens back hundreds of years

If I've done the math correctly (and I'm sure I've underestimated this number) I've participated in, at least 3, 484 worship services in my 67 years of living and that's not counting special ecumenical gatherings, mid-week Lenten services, Christmas Eve vigils, baccalaureate services, etc., etc.

that number could actually be closer to 5,000 worship experiences in my lifetime

I suppose the question I should be asking is: Has it made any difference in my life?

Does it really matter that worship is a regular part of my life's routine that I've spent so many hours in church (and, sometimes, a synagogue, a temple, or a mosque)

Do you ever wonder about things like that?

the Psalmist would suggest that worship is a natural response to the graciousness of God that because of God's blessings in our lives, we need to respond in some way and worship provides us with a context for that

but, as I thought a little more deeply about why I worship, I, actually came up with nine reasons why I keep adding to that number of worship services I have attended over the years

see how many of these reasons resonate with you

- 1) harkening back to the words of the Psalmist, "singing for joy" is a good way to spend time expressing my spirituality

I remember a friend, many years ago, saying at some social event I was attending (and this was a friend who, to the best of my knowledge, did not attend any church at that time in his life) "You know what I miss most from my childhood...something we did every day in school? Singing together."

he wasn't a person with outstanding musical gifts, but he found delight and a sense of solidarity and just plain fun singing with his friends in school. "Singing always lifts my spirits," he said

and that's one of the reasons I attend worship

music inspires me and when we sing together, not every hymn nor every Sunday, but regularly enough I am inspired or comforted, encouraged or called to think my mind is challenged, my heart is uplifted, and my soul is stretched

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there is something about blending our voices with others, especially when we harmonize (isn't that a great word) that reminds me I'm not alone in this journey through life

some Sundays, that's reason enough to come to church

I believe it was St. Augustine who once observed "He (or she) who sings, prays twice."

whenever I'm moved by the tune or the text of a hymn, I feel like my soul is restored

- 2) the second reason I appreciate worship is because community matters to me - always has, always will - and when I bow my head with others or hear my voice repeating an ancient creed, when I gather in a circle around the Lord's table I feel connected and I'm reminded that being connected is how we are called to live

in the wake of the tragic events in Charlottesville, VA last weekend someone has written: "We serve a God who delights in the dignity and worth of all humanity and who calls us to work for a more just society in the broken world we inhabit"

thoughts like that come to me in the midst of most every worship experience in which I participate, reminding me of other communities of which I am a part - my family, my work environment, my neighborhood, the city in which I live

the Kingdom of God is the kingdom of right relationships and worship reminds me of that on a regular basis

- 3) reflecting on the meaning of an ancient parable or a poem from scripture and considering how those words might apply to my life today is a particularly unique

part of why I worship and doing that often helps me consider, at a deeper level, the things I truly value in life

some of you may remember that the last time our gospel lesson for today appeared in our liturgical cycle, I happened to be preaching and I commented that day on the fact that I believe this text is a reflection of something we don't often think about – the fact that Jesus had a sense of humor

as Quaker theologian Elton Trueblood suggested in his book "The Humor of Christ" more than we realize, The Lord used irony to try to make a point

in this particular scenarios, his use of sarcasm, in seeming to put down the Canaanite woman, is, actually a way of making a point with his disciples

Jesus is, essentially, trying to get through to his followers the fact that ALL people matter to him and in referring to this woman as a 'dog' he is mimicking the way the disciples were seeing her

and because she was tuned into what Jesus was doing, she responds in kind, giving the disciples an important lesson in acceptance. "Go," Jesus affirms her, "you are a woman of great faith"

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One of the things Trueblood's theological perspective forces me to think about is how I use humor or sarcasm in my life...does it lift people up or put people down

and, so, examining my life in relationship to scripture is another essential component of worship

4) this hour of singing and praying and attempting to discern God's spirit really is different from what I do during the other 6 days of the week and while I try to follow a disciple of prayer and reflection, I'm not always faithful in doing so and so the regularity of coming together each week is important to me it provides me with the simple gift of asking questions like: Who IS God? What DO I believe?

and how does this hour impact the other 167 hours of my week

5) another thing I value about worship is that I often leave this sanctuary feeling included, welcomed, valued, even appreciated and that doesn't always happen during other encounters I have as my days unfold

sometimes that sense of belonging happens during our coffee hour, but it also happens when a fellow worshipper catches my eye and smiles at me or when we extend the right hand of fellowship to each other

just like I enjoy coming home at the end of the day or when I return from a trip, I enjoy coming home to St. Thomas each week where the stained glass windows or the sound of the organ or the faces in this circle are familiar to me

6) I find that during worship, my mind wanders, in the best sense of that word. It often happens when I'm singing a hymn...and I remember being a little boy sitting next to my Dad and hearing him sing along side or me...or I think of my own children or grandchildren worshipping at the same time in another place

I think of my past, my present, the years I have left on this earth
I think about the gift of life and the promise of life eternal and it all comes full circle for me in this hour

7) I also find that worship in this particular space has an added blessing in that I can look out these windows and consider the importance of our connection with our Jewish neighbors...to remember the unique history which we share in this community with the members of Beth Shalom, I reflect upon the way in which this congregation responded to an act of terror some years ago when someone attempted to desecrate the sanctuary next door by attempting to set fire to the synagogue and I give quiet thanks for that history as well as our shared history with the Jewish community over the centuries as people of faith

I am reminded in looking beyond our sanctuary that Jesus was not a Lutheran, but a Jew, and that has implications for every one of us here

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8) I also am reminded during this hour that I work with a specialized group of individuals from day to day – students at a university and while I am grateful for Lutheran Campus Ministry and our unique outreach to IU and other students

I have always appreciated that people in various stages of life come together each week in this place – young and old alike

I am often moved as I simply watch the way in which members care for those among us with limited physical abilities and the way some are assisted in coming together around the table

I am equally moved when I watch 2 year old Joshua Powell come forward with his family and with outstretched hands and excitement in his eyes receives the sacrament with an understanding which may just be way beyond that of many of us as adults

all of a sudden the secular becomes sacred
the ordinary becomes extraordinary
and the humdrum become holy

that, for me, is worship at it's very best

9) and, finally, worship allows me the opportunity to give something of myself to others

whether that's through my regular financial offering, my limited contributions to the choir, or my commitment to a particular cause which this congregation supports

I have long been grateful for the variety of ministries, which together we support in the city of Bloomington and beyond and the chance to strengthen those ministries is a gift in itself

Worship, someone once said, is a dress rehearsal for living

I like that analogy and I appreciate the way in which we rehearse together from week to week

So...what about you?

Do any of those reasons resonate with you?

And/or what might # 10, 11 or 12 be for you?

Why **do** we do this thing called worship from week to week...and what difference does it make in YOUR life?