



**A Loving, Beloved Community 4: Worshipping**

**Psalm 34:1-3; Revelation 5:11-14**

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We are in a sermon series called "A Loving, Beloved Community." We have talked about the serving community, the welcoming community, the healing community, and today the worshipping community.

We worship a lot here at Valley: twice on Sunday, every Wednesday evening, and wherever else we can put it in. We like to worship. And many of you invite your friends and neighbors to come worship with you. Often, this is what you hear: I golf on Sunday morning, and I can worship God on the golf course. I worship God in nature. My faith is private, and I worship God by myself.

What do you say to that?

Yes, we can worship God alone and that is great, but why do we do it together? This morning, we are going to talk about not only why we worship, but why we do it together. And hopefully, the next time someone says they worship God on their own, you can respond back why you do it in community.

Turn with me to our scripture passages listed in your bulletin (on screen at 8 a.m.).

Before we read, let us pray: Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen.

I had a hard time picking out scripture this morning. Not because I couldn't find any about worshipping God together, but because there were too many. Thus, we come to the first reason why we worship together: because we see it all throughout scripture. We are called over and over again to worship God together. Hear it in the Psalm.

Read Psalm 34:1-3 (The Word of the Lord.)

Let's start from the beginning. What is worship? The word worship comes from the word "worthship" - to attribute worth to. We worship God because God is worthy of worship.

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created." Rev 4:11

Did you know that worship is important to God? When God instructed Moses on how to talk to Pharaoh to rescue God's people from slavery, God says to Moses: tell Pharaoh to let my people go *so they may worship me*. God doesn't say let my people go so they can be free. No, let my people go so they can worship me.

Worship is important to God: 4 out of the 10 commands relate to the worship of God.

I Peter 2:9 says, "You are a chosen people....a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him...."

We are chosen to declare the praises of God. We are called to worship God because God is worthy and it is important to God.

So the big question: Why is it important to do it together in community?

One reason is in the Revelation scripture passage in your bulletin. John, the author, is in exile on an island called Patmos. He is there because he has been talking about Jesus too much. While on this island, John has a vision. In this vision, heaven opens and he witnesses an awesome worship service to God. Let's read it.

Read Revelation 5:11-14

Our gathering together in community to worship God shadows eternity.

I have a friend who once said, “Man, if all we do is worship in heaven, I am going to really bored.” Well, I have a feeling that our worship services here on earth are nothing compared to the worship services we will experience in heaven.

In this passage, we have members of the heavenly court completely into worship. It includes everyone and everything worshipping together: 100s of thousands of people from every tribe, tongue and nation worshipping Jesus. It includes every creature on earth and in heaven and under the earth and under the sea singing to the glory of God.

So here is the big news: Worship in heaven is not done alone. So, if you hate crowds you might have a problem. Our worship here is a foretaste of what we will experience in heaven. So we practice for that time.

When we come here to this sanctuary, we are a part of that heavenly assembly. We gather to hear God speak through his Word, and to sing his praises together, and so it is a reflection of that heavenly assembly.

We take part in something that reflects the fellowship that we look forward to in eternity. We embrace our ultimate hope. We anticipate the new creation. We are rewarded with the promise that we are already taking part in it, glorifying God in the heavenly assembly.

What better reason do you need to worship God together?

But wait! I have another reason!

It is here in this place that we hear and are changed by the word of grace. It is here that we are told that we are a child of God. It is here that we receive

communion and hear the words, “Child of God, the body of Christ given for you.” And we can look at the most obnoxious person we know in this assembly, and see them as ones who are children of God, and they too receive the Body of Christ. We see them through the frame of grace. This does not happen alone. It happens in a community beloved by God and worshipping together.

Our Session is going to try something new when they meet together starting in February. They are going to start with a meal together. Then go into the sanctuary, surround the communion table, worship together, read scripture together, and serve each other communion. After eating together and extending grace to one another, during the meeting that follows, it will be harder to argue or be mad at the person you just extended the body of Christ to.

You often hear people say, “I am spiritual, but not religious.” The word religious has gotten a bad rap lately. Let me put it in a positive light. To say you are spiritual is an individualistic thing. But to be religious, as another pastor said, “is to be human in the midst of other humans who are as equally messed up and obnoxious and forgiven as ourselves.” (Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Accidental Saints*)

What better reason to worship together?

But wait! I have another reason! There are things that God does in our hearts through the gathering of His people. When we gather together we benefit from all the spiritual gifts of the body of Christ. If we only sing in our cars and read the Bible at home—we miss the encouragement that comes by being with the body of believers. In a worshipping community, we benefit from the encouragement of others. We’re reminded that the body of Christ is bigger than us as individuals.

Hebrews says, “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another.” Hebrews 10:24-25

Worshipping together reminds us of the hope we have in Christ. Worshipping together helps to fight sin in our lives and in the world. Worshipping together helps us in our relationships as we can reflect Christ out in the world.

Do you see what we have? We have the opportunity to gather together as a foreshadow of heaven. We have the opportunity to boldly approach the throne of God in worship because the body of Christ was torn for us.

We sing praises to God together because of who God is and what God has done in our lives. We study together the Holy Scriptures and hear God speak. We gather for prayer and know that God is with us and hears us.

King David said: "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'" (Psa. 122:1)

So when you ask someone to come to church with you and that person says, "I worship God alone," you can say, "If you think worshipping God alone is great, wait until you try it together with other believers.

There is no more beautiful sight than people gathering together to worship God, the Creator of the universe. When you all come into this place, we who are up front, feel your desire to worship God, your expectation that God is here and something is going to happen to you and us as a church.

I leave you with a true story. I am going to answer my first question on the sermon notes: *Recall an experience of worship that was especially meaningful to you. What stands out in your memory?*

When I was in the ordination process in the Presbyterian Denomination, I was a pastoral intern at my home of church 25 years in Minneapolis, MN. One of the pastors there was Craig.

Craig was a baby boomer, and as all you baby boomers know, we deny aging. Craig decided to play basketball one day without warming up, and torn his Achilles tendon. For 2 months he was either in a cast or a boot.

He was scheduled to have that cast removed the Wednesday before Easter. I remember him walking down the office hallway at the church informing all in range that he was off to get that cast removed. "The next time you see me, " he said, "this cast will be gone." We cheered him on.

The next day was Maundy Thursday. I was in charge of the worship service that night, and we were going to re-enact Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet. Craig had a part in this re-enactment. As I was preparing the worship service, we received a phone call that Craig appeared to have a heart attack and was taken to the hospital.

Sandy, one of the other pastors, rushed to bedside, and I began to rework the worship service for that night. An hour later, we received the phone call. Craig didn't make it. He was dead at the age of 43. We found out later that a blood clot had formed in his cast, and when the cast was removed, the blood clot was released and traveled up to his heart and killed him in front of his 15 year old son.

We were devastated. In shock. We didn't know what to do. Other pastors from our denomination came to be with us. People were arriving for the worship service that night. We decided not to do what I had planned, yet we didn't know what to replace it with.

Sandy spoke up and said, "Why don't I get up first and tell them about Craig." Buck, another pastoral intern, said, "I will pray." I then spoke up because an idea had come to me: Let's have our people themselves minister to us and to each other. I will ask them to read a scripture passage, or suggest a hymn, or pray.

That's as far as we got for it was time to start the worship service. The sanctuary, as large as this sanctuary, was full. Sandy, with tears streaming down her eyes, got up and told the people about Craig's passing. Buck got up and prayed. Then I got up and said, "We want to hear from you. We want you to take this service. Right now, God is giving you a scripture passage or a hymn or a prayer. Please share it with us."

And they did. The first person stood up and read a Bible passage. The second person suggested a hymn. Someone prayed. And it went on and on as God led that service.

It finally came time for Sandy to give the invitation to communion. In the front of the sanctuary, we had large stained glass windows that went from floor to ceiling. They were called Resurrection windows. They faced west.

As Sandy started the invitation to communion, she suddenly stopped, pointed to the Resurrection windows and said, "Look!" All that day, the sky was heavy with deep, dark clouds. At that moment, there was a break in the clouds where the sun was setting, and the rays from the sun hit the Resurrection windows.

Sandy pointed to all of us, and as we looked at one another, we were covered in the colors of the Resurrection windows. We sat silently in holy awe.

You don't think God was speaking to us? This is why we worship together. When we do so, God does something supernatural in our hearts and in our church community.

The story continues. In 3 days was Easter. I couldn't fathom celebrating Easter, that joyous, celebratory service. We had 4 services scheduled on Easter. How could we go through them all? All I wanted to do was curl up in bed and stay there until Easter was over. We had planned 4 mini-sermons spread throughout the service, and I was giving one of them. I had to be there, and it was the last thing I wanted to do. I didn't sleep Saturday night, dreading Easter morning.

The day arrived, and it was time to start the first service. I was to welcome everyone. This is what I said:

*Today is Easter. This is the day we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And because of that we know that when we leave this earth we will one day be face to face with Jesus. This is the hope of Christianity. And our beloved pastor, Craig, is now celebrating Easter face to face with Jesus Christ.*

With that, God took over. We were filled with joy and experienced a taste of heaven. I don't know if heaven came down to us or we were lifted into heaven, but whatever it was, it filled that room, us, that day.

Ushers told us later that people were coming up asking if they could stay and do it all over again. We did the same service again and again. Each time it became sweeter and more joyful, and we were strengthened to carry out all four services. And when it was done, I turned to our music director, who was grinning foolishly along with me, and said, "Can we do it again?"

This is why we worship together. God shows up in a supernatural way, and ministers to our broken hearts and bodies, and we are filled with joy because we are experiencing this together as the loving, beloved Community of Christ.

Come, let us worship together.