

Encountering God Together
Psalm 100 and Colossians 3:12-17
September 15, 2019
Rev. Diane Christopher

During the month of September, I am doing a sermon series based on our new mission statement and the 5 principles to accomplish it. These are listed on the sermon page of your bulletin. Let's take a look at it together. A mission statement tells why we exist as a church. It expresses our goals as a church.

Here it is:

VPC's Mission Statement: To make Christ known through reconciliation while communicating respect and love to all people.

The principles to accomplish this are:

- Worship that glorifies God
- Growing in our faith in love, hope and the peace of Christ
- Caring for the children of God
- Reaching out to the community and the world
- Seeking an attitude of servant-hood

There is one scripture passage that encompasses our mission statement and the 5 principles. It is Colossians 3. Every week we will read this passage. Then I will add another scripture passage that gives the theme for the day.

Two weeks ago, we looked at the last part of our mission statement: communicating respect and love to all people. I couched it in one word: hospitality. Hospitality also is implied in the last 3 principles: caring for people, reaching out, an attitude of servant-hood.

Today, we are going to look at principle #1: Worship that glorifies God. The Psalm that Jeff read is a Psalm of worship. And in the Colossians passage it says in verse 16 "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts." This describes worshipping God together.

Let's start from the beginning. What is worship?

I grew up in Minnesota. I remember back 1987 when the Minnesota Twins baseball team won the right to go the World Series for the first time since the 1960s. They won that right while they were on the road.

As the Twins were traveling back home, everyone in Minneapolis was so excited that the city opened up the stadium, the Metrodome, for anyone who wanted to come and celebrate with the team. They announced it on the news a couple hours before the team was scheduled to arrive. They expected, at best, 10,000 people.

The team was told, as they were flying to Minneapolis, that a few reporters and people were going to be at the stadium to welcome them home. To the surprise of everyone, 50,000 people showed up that night – they packed the stadium – and the celebration was on. Each player was introduced to wild applause; some players gave speeches.

Not one fan walked away saying, “That event was a dud. It didn’t do anything for me.” The event was a success not because the performance was great (they didn’t play any baseball), or because the players’ speeches were inspiring (most of them weren’t very good speakers), but because everyone understood why they were there. The purpose was not to please the fans, but to honor the team. People walked away saying, “That was great! I hope the team understands how much we appreciate them!” The fans were honoring the team, and doing it together.

Worship is honoring God.

Ps 29:2 “Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.”

Worship is honoring God. Worship is an act that shows how magnificent God is. Worship expresses how great and glorious God is. Worship is reflecting the value and worth of God. We make Christ known through worship.

(Marie sings, *We Will Glorify...*)

One of the most glorious things about a worship service is an awareness of the presence of God in the midst of His people. There is nothing more powerful than sensing that presence with others. This awareness of the presence of God is more important than an impressive choir, an outstanding soloist, or even a great message from scripture.

When Moses encountered God on the mountaintop, he had the opportunity to ask God for anything in the universe. Do you know what Moses asked for? He asked for two things from God: Let me see Your glory. Teach me Your ways.

As we worship, we encounter God together. We get a glimpse of God's glory together, and we learn God's ways together. To make Christ known through worship.

And as we worship, it does something to our souls, doesn't it? We come to worship because we want God to speak a word of life into our soul. We want a touch of the Divine. Because not only do we come to meet with God, God meets with us as well. It is a relationship.

People come to church because they expect to find God here. One author said (Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism*): "Our whole culture...is starving for an extraordinary glimpse of God...people are hungry for spiritual things. What people want today is God. They want to feel God, to know God...There is no substitute for the presence of God."

One pastor (John Piper) said this: "One of the greatest needs among churches today is not new programs, a new seminar, or a new study. What is needed today is an encounter with God. We desperately need a life-changing glimpse of the greatness, the awesomeness, the wonder, the power, the mercy, the goodness, and the lovingkindness of God."

Now, some of you may be saying, "Most of the time when I come, I don't get that out of worship." You are not alone.

Several years ago, Barna Research Group did a survey of adults in churches across North America. 71% of the adults who regularly attend church said, “I have never experienced the presence of God in worship. Never.”

Jim Smith went to church on Sunday morning. He heard the organist miss a note during the prelude, and he winced. He saw a teenager talking when everybody was supposed to be bowed in silent prayer. He felt like the usher was watching to see what he put in the offering plate and it made him mad. He caught the preacher making a slip of the tongue five times in the sermon. He actually counted. As he slipped through the side door during the closing hymn, he muttered to himself, “Never again, what a bunch of clods and hypocrites!”

Ron Jones went to church one Sunday morning. He heard the organist play an arrangement of “A Mighty Fortress” and he was thrilled at the majesty of it. He heard a young girl take a moment in the service to speak her simple moving message of the difference her faith makes in her life. He was glad to see that this church was sharing in a special offering for the hungry children in Nigeria. He especially appreciated the sermon that Sunday – it answered a question that had bothered him for a long time. He thought as he walked out the doors of the church, “How can someone come here and not feel the presence of God?”

Both men went to the same church, on the same Sunday morning. Each found what he was looking for.

When you come to worship on Sunday mornings to glorify God, don’t come with your hands full; come with your hands empty to receive from God. As you lift your praises to God, God in turn fills you.

Here are some suggestions of what you can do to experience the presence of God at a worship service with your brothers and sisters in Christ:

Come with a hunger and thirst. Jesus said – blessed are those who hunger and thirst for they will be filled. Come with a thirst and hunger for the presence of God.

Come with an open heart. Come with a longing to hear God speak.

Have a Holy Spirit focus. Come not only for you, but for God. Ask: what can I give to God today during this worship service.

Come with a hope. Approach worship with the hope that God has an answer. If you come to worship with an open heart, a Holy Spirit focus, and a hunger, you will leave with real hope.

Our scripture passage today tells us to read the Psalms, to sing hymns and songs with gratitude in your heart. We sing not because it is our duty or because it is tradition. We sing because it is a way to glorify God, to get to know God and obtain more of God's fullness.

When we approach worship in this way, worship transforms from a duty to devotion; it transforms from a ritual to relationship; it transforms from just another meeting to a holy gathering.

Come hungry. Come willing. Come expecting God to speak. Come anticipating an experience with the Creator of the universe.

Let us continue in an act of worship by saying together Psalm 100, a psalm of worship (Please stand):

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

² Worship the Lord with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.

³ Know that the Lord is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his^[a];
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.

⁵ For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Amen and amen.