

It's a Privilege to Be Here!

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Sermon for September 29, 2013

Psalm 42:1-2

It is indeed a privilege to be here today to take part in this service of worship in this incredibly beautiful worship space. We are truly blessed to be able to come to this church for worship!

What we are exploring today in the Committed to Christ series is the meaning and value of worship. When we come together to worship we are not coming as observers, the way one would when going to a play, a concert, a lecture, or a movie. When we come to worship we come as participants in a corporate act – we are doing something together, not sitting back watching those up front perform.

So what is it we are doing together that requires your participation? I looked up worship in the dictionary and I beg to differ with number nine on the list – “to attend services of divine worship.” I can attend something, witness it, observe it, but not fully participate in it; especially if we are going with definitions #1 & 3 – “reverent honor and homage paid to God” and “adoring reverence or regard.” As we worship here together, if we want the full effect of what it means to revere our Creator and Sustainer we cannot simply sit back and watch.

I'm always perplexed when people say to me they're really not being “fed” by worship, that they don't get anything out of it. In the back of my mind I'm thinking, “Then you're not coming into worship with the right mindset.” We come to worship best when we come with the intention of giving honor and praise to God, of saying thank you to God, giving back not only our offering but dedicating our very selves to God's service. What else would we do in response to the incredible gift God has given us when he sent Jesus to save us from evil?

If I come to observe, sitting back and waiting to be given something, then I come with the wrong attitude. I've come with a worldly attitude that says if I pay the admission cost, I'd better get a good show. I'd better get something for my money. I'd better receive a good meal that feeds my soul. Then I wonder what's wrong. Why do I walk away feeling just as empty as when I walked in the door? Perhaps it's because I've missed the point of worship.

It is a privilege to come to worship – to give honor and glory to God, the awesome creator of all the beauty we see in nature, the magnificent stars and northern lights, and the miracle of life. Our consumer culture has done us a disservice. When we come to worship we come not as consumers, but as producers; producing songs of praise, prayers of gratitude and confessions of our sins, our fears and our brokenness. We humble ourselves before God in adoration of the power and

might God has to heal our brokenness, and give us new life in the shadow of Jesus' cross, where God's Son freely gave his life in order that we would have access to God's grace. And because God loves us and hears our prayers, we can be forgiven and strengthened, healed and lifted up out of pits of despair and into the glorious light of God's mercy.

What a privilege it is to be here - have access to that kind of love! What a privilege it is to be able to humble ourselves in such a beautiful place as this— together with fellow believers who are learning how to love right alongside us – to love with the kind of love Jesus modeled for us. Better is one day in His courts than a thousand elsewhere! I'd rather be a humble doorkeeper in God's house than to live in lavish wealth because I know my soul is made whole by this God that doesn't withhold good. Eugene Peterson phrases it this way in *The Message*: "I'd rather scrub floors in the house of my God than be honored as a guest in the palace of sin."

If we come to worship to get something, odds are we'll walk away empty; but if we come to give something we mysteriously find ourselves filled to the brim. God works that way. When we serve in mission, helping others, we find ourselves receiving joy and blessings we never imagined possible. Lives are changed when serving through missions. Lives are changed when we humble ourselves in worship of God. Lives are changed when we come together as a group to worship. When we look around us and see how God has been active in each other's lives we become living witnesses to the power of God's transforming love. That is something to be celebrated! That is a God to be praised, not for what we'll get out of it, but for the pure joy of celebrating together the love of God in Christ and God's presence here with us as we gather.

Coming together in God's name is an incarnational act; it brings God to us, present and real. We hear God's Word as we read the Bible together. We learn of God's acts throughout history and it reminds us of the power of God – power for the good, power for God's people. We are reminded that evil will not win in the end. God wins. Jesus is alive!

This is the God we worship here today, the one who loves us enough to keep giving us chances to repent our selfishness, our greed, and our various sins, and in response to our confession we are forgiven and strengthened for the next leg of the journey called life.

Worship is a means of grace; it is a vehicle through which God enters our lives and shapes us, molds us, beckons to us, and leads us. What a privilege it is to worship! And what a wonderful thing it is that in the Presbyterian Church we celebrate the open table; which not only means that any person who loves the Lord and seeks a closer relationship can take communion as we will next week, but any person can join together with us in the act of worship – giving honor and praise to God on the Sabbath, thereby being welcomed into this means of grace as part of this body of Christ.

We gather in worship as a group because God did not create us to be autonomous individuals. God created us to be in relationship with one another, and so it's important to gather as a community to focus our hearts and minds on God. The corporate nature of worship helps us see and truly believe that we are not alone on the journey of life. Others have experienced what we are going through and they have understanding and compassion that can help us. They are living examples of what God can do in a person's life when we have faith and rely on God. Each of us is a living witness to others of what God means to us and has done for us.

“We gather in worship to lift up and celebrate all that God is doing in the lives of the congregation, and to lift up those individuals who are struggling. That's why we take time to pray specifically for the joys and concerns of our congregation.

Finally, we gather in worship to remind ourselves that God truly is Lord of us all. Just as we need one another, we need God's active presence in our lives, and regularly gathering and proclaiming God's lordship as a community has a profound effect on our faith.”¹

It's an awesome God we worship! It's the One true God that we worship – the one with the power to give life, everlasting life! Together with God, all things are possible! Amen.

¹Bob Crossman, *Committed to Christ: Six Steps to a Generous Life*, (Abingdon Press, 2012), pg. 107.