

It is not often that I find myself moved to preach from the psalm as my text for the day, but today that's what I'm going to do. Listen again to these words with which our psalm opens today:

Hallelujah!

How good it is to sing praises to our God! *

How pleasant it is to honor him with praise!

Our psalm today is an invitation to praise, an invitation to worship God.

Worship is at the very center of our lives as people of faith. Here we are, every Sunday morning, week after week, gathering together in this place to worship God. But, go on, be honest, we don't talk about it a lot. We almost take it for granted. It's just something we do.

And yet it's not something that many people *around* us do. If you were to talk with your neighbors, or your friends, how many of them get up on a Sunday morning to go worship God? Sports, yes; shopping, yes. But church? Not so much. Worship is the one thing we do that makes us different from every other community group and organization around us. It sets us apart.

We worship God in Christ.

So let's talk a little bit more about it.

- ***What*** is worship?
- ***Why*** worship?
- And ***how*** do we do it?

First: **What is worship?**

The word "worship" comes from an old English word that means to acknowledge someone's worth, their dignity, their glory. So when it comes to God, the act of worship is to acknowledge

- **God's** worth
- **God's** dignity
- **God's** glory.

And that's exactly what our psalm is doing today. It talks about all the things that God has done that makes God worthy of praise:

- rebuilding Jerusalem
- gathering the exiled
- healing the brokenhearted
- binding up wounds
- counting the stars
- lifting up the lowly

and so forth.

All of this is talking about

- the worth
- the worthiness
- the glory of God

that makes God *worthy* of worship.

Another way of thinking about worship is to go back to the original language used by the early church. The word that came to be translated as “worship” is the Greek word, *leitourgia*, which means, “an act of service to the people.” The early Church borrowed this word from its everyday usage in commerce and used it to talk about worship. It’s the word that became our word, *liturgy*, and it literally means “the work of the people.” It is the work that we, as Christians, offer to God.

And that of course leads us to the next question: **Why worship God?**

One answer is the one I just talked about. ***Because God deserves it.*** It’s a simple way of saying thank you to the God who created us and continues to bless us and sustain us.

But there are other answers too.

One is that ***worship is an essential human activity.*** Time after time as they study different cultures anthropologists discover that patterns of worship can be found in just about all of them. Something about being human gives us the impulse to worship, to give thanks and honor to something *beyond* ourselves.

The Presbyterians have a wonderful first question in their *Westminster Catechism*. You may have heard it at some point, even though it is not exactly the way our Catechism states it:

Q. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Our very purpose, the way we were created is to worship God. That idea is echoed in the *Book of Common Prayer*, which asks,

Q. What is the duty of all Christians?

A. The duty of all Christians is to follow Christ; to come together week by week for corporate worship; and to work, pray, and give for the spread of the kingdom of God.

Our purpose and our duty is to worship God.

Of course, that impulse to worship *can* go astray. We see it in the first of the Ten Commandments:

**I am the Lord your God:
You shall have no other gods but me.**

or in other translations,

You shall have no other gods *before* me.

We don't often think about having other gods – few if any of us have shrines to other deities in our living rooms – but what it's really about is *anything* that is more important to us than God, anything that comes before God. Because when that happens, we are, in effect, worshipping them more than we worship God. Whether it's sports, or money, or our professions, nothing should come before worshipping God.

But there are other reasons to worship God.

- Not just because God deserves it
- Not just because God commands it
- Not just because we're made that way.

But because worship benefits *us* as much as it benefits God. Worship grounds us.

- It re-connects us with the people we were made to be.
- It brings us into God's presence.
- It connects something deep within our hearts with the very heart of God.

So to our final question: **How do we worship?**

One answer is straightforward. As Anglicans – Episcopalians – we worship by the book, the ***Book of Common Prayer*** (or one of the supplemental books authorized to go along with it, like ***Enriching Our Worship***.) That provides the basic structure, the content of our worship.

But it's not the only answer. Because the question here is really not the mechanical, "How do we worship?" No, the question really is: ***How can we worship?*** Our lives are crazy busy, we hardly seem to be able to breathe. We can make it once a month, but *every week?* It just seems too hard.

This is where the wisdom of Jesus comes in. Today's gospel tells of one day in Jesus' life. He was staying in a small town, at his disciple Simon Peter's family home. First of all he'd healed Simon Peter's mother in law; then, as word spread, person after person came wanting him to touch them, to heal them. It was a relief when night fell. He'd been busy all day teaching, healing; finally everyone was gone. And he, and all his disciples, at last went to sleep.

But then they were awakened by the clamor of voices outside, a whole *new* group of people wanting to be healed, and Jesus seemed to be missing. They finally tracked him down high on a hillside well away from the town. "What are you doing? Everybody's looking for you!"

"I'm praying," he said. Because Jesus knew that he couldn't afford for all the busyness in the world, to get in the way of his spending time with God.

How do *we* worship in the middle of *our* busy lives?

We have to decide to stop and *make* time. The other things will wait. And what I've found is that when I do that, everything else still gets done. When I put worshipping God first, everything else falls into place.

And of course, it's easiest to do when it's a habit. After a while it just becomes the thing that you do, something you don't even have to think of, like brushing your teeth. On Sundays you get up and worship God.

When we struggle to worship, all we need to do is show up and look for something to give thanks for. It might be

- the shape of a snowflake, or
- the child in the next pew,
- the smile of someone we're glad to see, or
- a song, a hymn, that touches something deep in our soul.

We come, we come today to worship God. The one who is great and mighty and takes great delight in us.

Hallelujah!

How good it is to sing praises to our God! *

How pleasant it is to honor him with praise!"

Amen.