

August 16, 2020

Worship Changes Us

Core: Values That Shape Us

Philippians 2: (1-4) 5-13

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Bible Intro

We're in the middle of our sermon series on our core values here at Zumbro. We've touched on how Jesus is the center of our life together and how everyone is welcome. This week's value, and our Big Idea is that Worship Changes Us. These aren't just values that shape us at Zumbro. They shape all of our lived experience as people of faith. These values are for us as a community gathered together around a common mission. They also serve as a way we live out our faith as individuals and as families. In times that we are more physically scattered than we've ever been, these values ground our faith.

The purpose of Paul's letter to the Philippians was to give believers ways to think and act as Christians, especially as he was way from them. It starts with grounding our worship in who God chose to be, the crucified and risen Christ. This image changes everything.

My family didn't start going to church until I was about 7 or 8 years old. I suppose there was some correlation to the time my sister, who's seven years younger than me was baptized, and my mom figured it was time to get me in Sunday School. Maybe this is a familiar story for some of you too.

I'm not sure how it happened, other than by the power of the Holy Spirit, but there was something about worship that mesmerized me from the very beginning. I loved the

music and the drama of worship – how we confessed sins and then the pastor declared with absolute assurance and authority that God forgave us – just like that! I loved the chanting of the eucharistic prayer before communion, and the congregation’s response of Holy, Holy, Holy, as though we were being transported straight to the throne of grace as we all made our way to the front of the sanctuary to receive communion. Notice I didn’t say much about the sermon. I think for kids, the sermon is an acquired taste, like coffee or wine. It takes an amount of maturity to fully appreciate it.

But, even in my childhood innocence and naivete, I had a sense that worship wasn’t an escape from reality...but that it was more real than anything else we could experience. After all, what could be more real than feeling so close to God’s grace and glory in that hour or so of worship.

I asked people on facebook this week why worship is important to them.

Overwhelmingly, people said it’s about connection, community, and the sacraments. I assume they were considering their worship experiences before pandemic. But nonetheless, it says something deep about what worship is and why it changes us. We are of course changed by our encounter with the living God, but we are also encouraged and transformed by our connection with others. *(8:30 only) Which is why it still feels odd to preach to a video camera rather than to be in the presence of all of you these days.*

And at the same time, I believe that God is working through this time. And that we will continue to share the hope of Jesus with all kinds of people through online worship well after we are worshiping in person again.

Pandemic worship has led to worship of convenience, which is not necessarily a bad thing. You may join in live at 8:30 on Sunday mornings or worship when it works best for your schedules. There are some Sundays mornings when I am walking through my front

door at home and my family is just sitting down to worship – sometimes with waffles. It may not be some people’s idea of reverence, but it is still worship to pray and sing (or at least hum), to share communion together, and experience the same grace and glory that people have encountered in worship for centuries.

The earliest Christians in Philippi risked their lives to claim that worshiping Jesus was the most real thing in life. Paul wrote this letter to them from prison. He’d been arrested for calling on people to worship Jesus rather than the political leaders of their day. The gospel message threatened the elite and those who wielded power over the masses. It was an alternative way to live with others in shared community. Paul encouraged these new Christians to live their lives in ways that were worthy of the gospel, to be united in faith, and to imitate Christ’s humble and loving ways of putting others’ interests ahead of one’s own. He even went so far as to call on the church to be of the same mind.

Today some may consider a collective mind to be a bad idea. Social psychologist Irving Janis coined the word “Groupthink” to describe the phenomenon in which group pressure results in flawed or senseless decisions that may hurt others. We’ve seen this recently in the rise of openly racist and white supremacist sentiment, in the rejection of science and expertise in medicine during the worst pandemic the world has seen in 100 years, and in calls for the destruction of police departments, rather than reform and restructuring of institutions called to protect and serve all people.

Groupthink can be devastating to society, but Paul calls on us to consider a different kind of Groupthink, in which a community of people exhibits a transformed mind by following Jesus’ example of humility and service to others. Instead of crawling over the top of people to get ahead, Christians are called to work collectively to raise others up, and above all to place Jesus’ example at the center of our lives.

Being of the same mind as Christ starts with a commitment to who Jesus is, and how Jesus chose to enter into our world. He didn't choose an upward path of fame and glory, but a downward path of service, to the point of slavery and humiliating death. He did this in order to show the world the depths of God's love for all living things. Our worship of this kind of God changes us, as we not only lift our praise and prayers to Christ, who knows the full dimensions of our lives, but as we bind our lives to his and commit our lives to God who promises to work in us and through us in all that we do.

This is ultimately what changes us – giving God access to encounter us in worship and then opening ourselves to God working in and through us in our lives. We Lutherans tend to be kind of heady bunch. We like theology about God, but some of us are a bit squeamish about a lived experience with God. Writer Barbara Brown Taylor said it well when she wrote, “in an age of information overload...the last thing any of us needs is more information about God. We need the practice of incarnation, by which God saves the lives of those whose intellectual ascent has turned them dry as dust, who have run frighteningly low on the bread of life, who are dying to know more God in their bodies. Not more *about* God. [Just] More God.”

This is where worship has power. When the news causes us to fear others who are different than us, the gospel of Jesus tells us to love fearlessly. When we feel broken and ashamed; the world tells us to hide it, yet in worship our confession of brokenness is met with the assurance that God can handle all of our messes and that the feeling of brokenness and death will be met with resurrection and new life. When we feel alone the church welcomes us, just as we are. When we lose track of who we are or what we are called to be, God meets us with a call and a purpose that gives us an identity and a community in which to live out that call. When we are spiritually empty, Christ meets us at the table and offers us the bread of life and the cup of salvation that we all so

desperately need. When we are sick, Christ anoints us with healing in our bodies, minds, and spirits, and blesses us with companions in the struggle. We don't need to know more about any of these things, *we just need these things*.

I realize that I am preaching to the choir today. You're all here already. But imagine what could happen when we grab hold of this story and these promises from God wholeheartedly. Imagine how it would feel when we all commit to having the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. Imagine what could happen when you invited a friend who is spiritually "dry as dust" to worship with us, even online. My dear brothers and sisters, we know that worship changes us because people have been changed for two thousand years by praying and praising, confessing and eating, singing, and yes, sermonizing. And God is working in us today, giving us God's vision of Jesus Christ as Lord, and offering us a seat at the throne of God's grace and glory. Amen.