

Sermon Notes for 9/25/16 (Pentecost 19)

Preached at Jehovah Lutheran – St. Paul, MN

Text: Deuteronomy 10:19-21

Theme: What Lutheran Worship Is, and Why We Worship

The Point: We worship because our Lord, whose greatness and grace call for praise, has designed and shaped us so that worship is our “native tongue.”

Introduction: When I say the word “worship,” what comes to your mind? I suspect that you have images like what you see around you here in this place. You probably think of singing hymns and praying, you may see in your mind’s eye the pastor robed to lead a service or a well-practiced organist leading the music or a choir singing or people reading the Scriptures, etc. Now that is not necessarily a bad thing. But we dare not define worship simply by what goes on in a church service. Isaiah denounced the people in his day “who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, and like David improvise on instruments of music; who drink wine from bowls, and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph.”

Simply going through the motions of worship is not true worship. After all, Jesus warned the people of His day not to be taken in by those who led sacrifices or fasted or prayed publicly when their real purpose was to be noticed by others. “Whitewashed tombs,” He called them. How do we define worship, then?

Worship is the natural language of the Christian. God tests worship by the motive of the heart. True worship is never undertaken for the sake of getting on God’s good side. Christian worship involves the recognition that God is already on our side – and as a result rejoices and gives thanks. Worship is the overflow of a heart full of faith in Jesus Christ and full of gratitude for God’s many gifts. Luther says: “To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.” Prayer is the worship of a faith-filled heart.

We could hardly speak about Lutheran worship without reference to Martin Luther and the Lutheran confessions. In the Augsburg Confession (that basic document of Lutheranism), we read “The highest form of divine service [or worship] is sincerely to seek and call upon. . . Jesus Christ in every time of need.” In other words, faith is the highest form of worship. Trust in the Triune God, leaning upon Him for our every requisite for life – this is the worship to which we are called by Holy Scripture.

Speaking of the woman who washed Jesus’ feet, the reformers said, “The woman came believing that she should seek the forgiveness of sins from Christ. This is the highest way of worshipping Christ. Nothing greater could she ascribe to him.” We are beggars on our knees before the great high King. This is the essence of worship, that we acknowledge God as the only One who could solve our real dilemma, the dilemma of sin that brings guilt, despair, and the grave. But God forgives – and for that we worship Him!

In addition, we learn that the works that flow from faith are also a devout act of worship. All that the believer does in faith according to God’s will is an act of worship that honors Him. When you children make your beds in the morning and complete your homework, you are worshipping your Lord. When you spouses forgive that husband or wife who seems to take you for granted, you are worshipping the Lord. When you workers put in a day’s work for a day’s pay, when you mothers change another diaper, when you grandparents bear witness to your grandchildren about the Lord’s forgiveness, you are worshipping.

Listen to how the apostle Paul deals with these two dimensions of worship in today’s epistle: “I charge you to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will bring about at the right time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of

kings and Lord of lords. It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.” Seeing the unsurpassed greatness and the unrivaled goodness of our Lord leads us to worship Him through serving Him in others.

So Paul continues: “But as for you, man of God, shun all this [namely loving money and possessions, the worship that the world exalts]; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called.” Once the Holy Spirit has claimed our hearts, then we do pursue righteousness, godliness, love, endurance, and all the rest. That is how our worship takes shape well outside the borders of this worship space.

Worship here on Sundays thus mimics the sort of worship you carry out Monday through Saturday. We confess our sins and receive forgiveness, a reminder of how critical it is that you forgive others. We declare our faith, a reminder that we are to bear witness to Christ’s centrality to those around us every day. We pray because we need to remember that we need our Lord’s strength and intervention every moment of our lives. And we sing our praises! What a blessing music is in our worship life. To quote Martin Luther again: “Next to the word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world. It controls our hearts, minds and spirits. A person who does not regard music as a marvelous creation of God does not deserve to be called a human being; he should be permitted to hear nothing but the braying of asses and the grunting of hogs!” So sing heartily – not only here in church, but with your children as they go to bed and get up in the morning, as you carry out your household chores, recalling that they represent your service to God, as you travel from place to place, asking God to direct your every step.

Conclusion: We worship because our Lord, whose greatness and grace call for praise, has designed and shaped us so that worship is our “native tongue.” What we do here on Sunday morning is a “dress rehearsal” for the real action of your daily life. Trust Christ’s promises – and let His Spirit guide and direct you for His honor and praise, today and always! AMEN!