

Sermon Notes for 10/23/16 (Pentecost 23)

Preached at Jehovah Lutheran – St. Paul, MN

Text: 2 Timothy 4:16-18

Theme: PROPELLED ON A MISSION TO THE WORLD

The Point: Worship is not mere entertainment to keep people amused; worship is a training ground for Christ's disciples, who carry out a critical, Gospel-centered mission to the world around them.

Introduction: During the past several weeks, we have centered our attention on “Our Way of Worship,” the pattern of worship or liturgy that is typically followed in our Lutheran congregations. Of course, the liturgy is not a straight-jacket, designed to force us all to use the same words and songs. But it is designed and crafted to lift our eyes to the cross of Jesus and to see the impact that His sacrifice has on this world, and especially on our lives. Once we have been renewed and refreshed in this vision, the liturgy also sees to it that we are PROPELLED ON A MISSION TO THE WORLD.

God's people are not simply navel-gazers, content to sing our favorite tunes and to have the pastor pat us on the back and to rejoice that we are not like those awful folks out there in the community and the world around us. If we come (and leave) with that spirit, the spirit of the Pharisee (as Jesus' parable reminds us), we leave God's house unforgiven, unjustified, and unready to carry forth with His ministry in our lives. If we inhabit these pews with a haughty, proud, contentious spirit, our worship is not acceptable to God, just as Cain's offerings were unacceptable to God due to his pride and self-exaltation against his brother.

One man has written this: “Scripture views the glorifying of God as a sixfold activity: praising God for all that he is and all his achievements; thanking him for his gifts and his goodness to us; asking him to meet our own and others' needs; offering him our gifts, our service, and ourselves; learning of him from his word, read and preached, and obeying his voice; telling others of his worth, both by public confession and testimony to what he has done for us. Thus we might say that the basic formulas of worship are these: ‘Lord, you are wonderful’; ‘Thank you, Lord’; ‘Please, Lord’; ‘Take this, Lord’; ‘Yes, Lord’; ‘Listen, everybody!’ This then is worship in its largest sense: petition as well as praise, preaching as well as prayer, hearing as well as speaking, actions as well as words, obeying as well as offering, loving people as well as loving God.” (James Packer, *Your Father Loves You*, p. 15)

One thing I would wish to add to Packer's description of worship is that worship involves first of all trusting God and receiving His gifts. In other words, faith is the ground and foundation of all our other worship. Scripture puts it this way: “Without faith, it is impossible to please him [God].” Packer puts stress on our actions in worship. But God's giving is the action without which our responses would have no meaning. The first expression of worship, then, is “I believe You, Lord.”

The tax collector stands as the model worshiper. The Pharisee came to the temple to show off his spit and polish, his carefully planned good deeds, his self-designed righteousness. But the tax collector was not trying to impress anyone, least of all God! He recognized his emptiness, his inability, his powerlessness, and his failure to live as God's Word demands. He humbled himself. His posture as well as his petition demonstrated this perfectly. He would not even lift his eyes to heaven, but beat upon his breast. And in his prayer, his heart poured forth: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” He knew that he had no “chips” to cash in before the Lord. He knew his sinfulness, and he mourned that condition, knowing that sin brings judgment.

But (as Scripture reminds us and as we repeat over and over in our worship), “If we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” So the tax collector trusted that his God would honor his repentance. God gets no pleasure out of bringing judgment

to bear on evil-doers. That does not delight Him. But He does take pleasure in removing our sins from us as far as east is from west. He does this by counting our sins against His own dear Son, who suffered for us all the punishment that our sins deserved. And in exchange God grants us the perfection, the goodness, the righteousness that Christ lived out during His life of obedience to the Father's will. So when God looks at His people, He sees us as the perfect, spotless bride of Christ, without spot or wrinkle or any other blemish.

This is what Paul was emphasizing when he wrote to Timothy, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing." The crown of righteousness is God's gift to us, bequeathed to us through the last will and testament of Jesus, God's Son. That righteousness we possess not by our accomplishments, but by Christ's actions for us.

As a result, we are empowered to live in God's world as God's representatives, His ambassadors, authorized by Him to carry out His will in our daily lives. One of our liturgical chants says it this way: "Thank the Lord and sing his praise; tell everyone what he has done. Let everyone who seeks the Lord rejoice and proudly bear his name." How do we rejoice and proudly bear His name? That happens as we bow in prayer over a meal, even one taken in a restaurant or on board a ship. It happens as we speak up on behalf of those who are suffering and unable to protect themselves. It takes place as we care for a needy neighbor, even one who shows no gratitude for the help we can give. It occurs as we face trouble and grief with a spirit that knows that we have an eternal inheritance in Jesus Christ. We rejoice and proudly bear Christ's name when we pray diligently for the needs of those around us. And His praise arises when we deal patiently with our own suffering and persecution for His name's sake.

Conclusion: Worship is not mere entertainment to keep people amused; worship is a training ground for Christ's disciples, who carry out a critical, Gospel-centered mission to the world around them. C.S. Lewis says this: "I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. If it were possible for a created soul fully to 'appreciate,' that is, to love and delight in, the worthiest object of all, and simultaneously at every moment to give this delight perfect expression, then that soul would be in supreme blessedness. To praise God fully we must suppose ourselves to be in perfect love with God, drowned in, dissolved by that delight which, far from remaining pent up within ourselves as incommunicable bliss, flows out from us incessantly again in effortless and perfect expression." In other words, our lives of service become our praise. Effortless and perfect expression of obedience, even in the face of opposition and hatred – this was the mark of our Savior's life. And by His Spirit's power, that same description can be given to our halting and frail efforts, as He covers our faults and enables us to serve others with joy and perseverance. This is the goal and purpose of our worship, today in God's house and tomorrow in our daily callings. In the strong name of Jesus, AMEN!