

Family Matters...Being the Family of God 3: “Practicing Passionate Worship”

But the time is coming – indeed it’s here now – when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.
John 4:23-34

2 weeks ago I shared with you that because of God doing a new thing in our midst; it might be time to reconsider our business as the Family of God. I challenged us to consider how we might practice Radical Hospitality, and last week we studied how practicing Extravagant Generosity might look. In this familiar passage Jesus introduces us to our next “Practice”...“Passionate Worship”.

The Bible is full of people practicing worship, but there are few concrete instructions for worship. This passage is an exception, though no attempt is made to define what worship conducted “in spirit and truth” might actually look like. So, I want to try and flesh out for us today (and maybe for the next decade or so) what “spirit and truth” worship looks like, for us. I know there are different models, different styles, and different forms of worship...all of which are legitimate in their own context...but this message is for us in our current context. It might not have fit us 20 years ago, and probably won’t fit us 10 years from now, but this is what I believe the Practice of Passionate Worship WILL look like for us now! Ready?

1. P. W. IS CONDUCTED IN HUMILITY, THE ATTITUDE OF WORSHIP

Come let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our maker, for he is our God. Psalm 95:6

As I studied the multiple passages from the Old and New Testaments, there is one posture, in the context of worship, which appears more often than any other... kneeling, falling on the face before God, the altar, Jesus, even the temple. It cannot be argued that there is any other physical posture that ‘says’ worship, more than kneeling, or falling prostrate before God. So why don’t we do that much any more?

Well, it's uncomfortable for one thing...and as much as I believe it was and is a physical reality that defines worship...I also believe that kneeling is a symbolic gesture that reflects the attitude of one's heart. Most of us understand that we can kneel in our hearts, even while standing on our feet, or sitting on our seats! And that is what must/will define our worship in the present and future into which God is leading us.

Most of us would probably agree that the music we experienced last week was a bit louder than we might be used to; but we cannot disagree that those young people who led us in worship were invisible instruments standing between us and God, leading us to God! They were humble servants, using their gifts, to enrich our worship, and engage us in it.

I hear often from viewers across the region that people like our worship services on TV. When I have the opportunity, I like to ask, what about it do you like? The majority respond, it seems real, authentic, spontaneous, not fake or put on. I like that. I often respond, 'yup, what you see is what you get, we're just trying to be who we are.' I learned one important lesson in worship and preaching class...about worship and preaching..."you can't lift up Jesus and yourself at the same time"! And I learned it the hard way.

The "truth" part of "Spirit and Truth" worship includes (partially at least) being humble, and being real, being authentic...don't you agree?

2. P. W. INVOLVES PRAISE, THE PRIMARY ACTION OF WORSHIP

Shout with joy to the Lord, all the earth! Worship the Lord with gladness. Come before him, singing with joy. Psalm 100:1

There are many different elements that make up worship. Let me try and mention a few. In the OT there was a huge emphasis on sacrifice in worship. We've almost completely lost that aspect, thanks to Jesus. We try and duplicate it by making 'sacrifices' of our earnings, but it's clearly not the same thing.

There is confession, repentance, and teaching; preaching the Word, prayer, liturgy, offerings, thanksgiving, adoration and various kinds of music. Read Ps 150 if you think that our drums or guitars are out of place...they are not! Worship involves silence, and shouting, singing, and even dancing...though I'm glad that the naked dancing of King David didn't really catch on. I know YOU are exceedingly glad!

But, the primary action of all those various acts of worship was and is Praise, the offering of adoration to the deity we love. Worship comes from the Latin word defined "Worth-ship", which means to ascribe worth, or give respect, or show love and demonstrate adoration to a being that we supremely revere.

I know that each of us might express our praise differently, and different cultures do so as well. In Bolivia there is much singing, shouting, dancing, even moving around the sanctuary. In this part of this country our worship tends to be more somber, more quiet, more contemplative...each of which is ok. That is precisely why we are trying to create worship experiences that offer both celebration and contemplation, each of which will hopefully afford you opportunities to extend your "worth-ship", your praise to God.

3. P. W. IS UNDERGIRDDED WITH PRAYER, THE AGREEMENT OF WORSHIP

Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple...She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshipping God with fasting and prayer. Luke 2:36-37

Prayer is another of those essential elements that appear in most worship experiences in the Bible, though there are many more kinds of prayer than the typical "pastoral prayer", we use in this part of the country. The prayers were often emotion filled weeping and wailings, there were shouts of prayer, there were songs of prayer, there were thoughts to be prayed, each different, each legitimate, as far as I can tell.

I want to focus for a minute on the prayer we share in common. Not just because it is beautiful poetry, nor because we've memorized it since just after birth; but because of one line...*Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done...on earth (in me) as it is in heaven.*

All prayer, but especially this one reminds us that prayer is really the agreement part of worship. When we pray for God's will to be done, we are agreeing to allow God to do with us, what God knows better than us, what needs to be done in us! (repeat) We can offer praise, adoration, and all the other elements of worship to God, but if we are not in agreement with God concerning God's will for our lives, our country, our church and our world, then most of that worship is vain repetition! We don't say the Lord's Prayer to impress God with our memory, but to impress God with our sincerity... that we agree to allow God to have God's way in and through us!

I want you to know that when you step foot in this building, on this property...that you have already been prayed for. I pray for people sitting in your individual pews. I pray for myself, I feel so unworthy to do what God's called me to do; I know I need God's help, every Sunday. Our worship team is not up here praying for a good "performance", we never use that word. We are praying for you, and for God to minister and bless you. Other saints across this city, many shut in their own homes or care centers have already prayed for what is happening at this very moment. We are being bathed in prayer right now! Will you agree to listen to God, and agree with what you hear? Good.

4. P. W. IS INSPIRED BY PASSION, THE AFFECTION OF WORSHIP

How lovely is your dwelling place O Lord of Heaven's Armies. I long, yes, I faint with longing to enter the courts of the Lord. With my whole being, body and soul, I will shout joyfully to the living God. Psalm 84: 1-2

One of the glaring differences between OT and NT "spirit and truth" worship, and most of what's offered as worship today, is the passion with which it is conducted. This passage is filled with passion for God; the Psalmist is yearning to worship God with his whole being, body and soul. He is so convinced of God's "worth-ship" he literally SHOUTS JOYFULLY to the LIVING GOD. I know I can't see into every heart, but cold-faced, stone-bored postures indicate to me that there is not much passion involved with your worship. Can you at least smile and nod your head once in awhile?

In the same way, one of the glaring differences between the worship of the builder generation and the worship of the late boomer, Gen X, and millennials, has to do with emotion. I know that most of you over 60 were taught to guard, even hide your emotions, and that is fine. But these younger generations are more emotional, which is also fine. Many of the older hymns and songs were written to describe the attributes and theology and awesomeness of God. While much of the newer songs try to ascribe praise and adoration to God, and even try to create an emotional bond between the worshipers and God. They are both ok, and we'll try not to neglect either. If you want to learn more about the generational difference, I'll direct you to our web-site, and a series I did a few years ago called: Bridging the G.A.P.S.

I guess all I really want to say further at this juncture is...get excited about something in worship. If song A doesn't turn your crank, sit or stand quietly and contemplate the meaning of the words. If a dance or drama or solo or hymn isn't your thing, sit or stand quietly and offer prayers for those who are being engaged sitting next to you. I've said this before, but it bears repeating, worship doesn't have to be entertaining, but it dare not be boring! I was taught as a preacher, if you can't get excited about something God has to say through you...then get a different job! I'd offer the same thing to you. If you can't get excited about something in the worship of the living God almighty...then get a different God! You don't have to take one of everything from the buffet table, but take something, and enjoy it! Get excited about it, be passionate about it, and don't be afraid to show that passion!

5. P. W. IS PERPETUATED BY OBEDIENCE, THE ACTION OF WORSHIP

They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.
Matt. 2:11-12

This passage is so helpful. The wise men act out for us much of what we've been discussing already today. They see Jesus...and immediately bow down and worship him. Humility. They offer their gifts, an act of sacrifice, praise and adoration. Each gift had symbolic and significant meaning, revealing their passion for what they were doing. They didn't march their camels 3 months across the desert following some far away star because they had nothing better to do...they were passionate about following wherever, and doing whatever God asked them to do.

But, when it came time to leave...they returned to their own country by another route. God warned them, and they did what God told them to do. I offer to you that their final act of worship was to obey God when, and as, and after, they left. It was not their act of worship; it was their action of worship!

There is no difference for us. I would like to translate the passage; "they left by a different route", to; "they left differently"...they left different than when they came in! Do we? Does our worship change us? If so then the only and best way to evidence that is to obey what God tells us, to do what God tells us to do. God speaks to people in worship, and if we try and leave the same way we came in, then I wonder if we've really listened...I wonder if we've really worshiped. Maybe as part of this practice we all ought to leave out a different door than the one we came in..."to leave differently", a symbolic reminder that God changes people through worship.

Worship is not something you go to, or do on Sunday. It is something that helps shape and define who you are, and what you do the other 6 days of the week. In this new era of First Church, I want to challenge all of us to simply do what God tells us to do. Passionate Worship is full of the Spirit, and is shaped by Truth.

Passionate Worship is authentic and it is engaging and inspiring. Passionate Worship is meaningful and purposeful, and helpful. Passionate Worship takes many forms, some you may like, and some you may not, but Passionate Worship is simply put: a reflection of your love, adoration, and yes, your PASSION for Jesus. **AMEN?**

Family Matters...Being the Family of God 3: “Practicing Passionate Worship”

But the time is coming – indeed it’s here now – when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.
John 4:23-34

What Passionate Worship Will Look Like:

- 1. P. W. IS CONDUCTED IN _____, THE _____ OF WORSHIP**
Come let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our maker, for he is our God. Psalm 95:6

- 2. P. W. INVOLVES _____, THE PRIMARY _____ OF WORSHIP**
Shout with joy to the Lord, all the earth! Worship the Lord with gladness. Come before him, singing with joy. Psalm 100:1

- 3. P. W. IS UNDERGIRDDED WITH _____, THE _____ OF WORSHIP**
Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple...She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshipping God with fasting and prayer. Luke 2:36-37

- 4. P. W. IS INSPIRED BY _____, THE _____ OF WORSHIP**
How lovely is your dwelling place O Lord of Heaven’s Armies. I long, yes, I faint with longing to enter the courts of the Lord. With my whole being, body and soul, I will shout joyfully to the living God. Psalm 84: 1-2

- 5. P. W. IS PERPETUATED BY _____, THE _____ OF WORSHIP**
They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod. Matt. 2:11-12

Family Matters...Being the Family of God 3: “Practicing Passionate Worship”

But the time is coming – indeed it’s here now – when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.
John 4:23-34

Study Guide

1. What is your favorite part of worship, and why do you think it is? What is the least meaningful part of worship for you, and why do you think that is?
2. What do you think Jesus meant when he said all ‘real’ worship would be done ‘in spirit and truth’?
3. How do you pray for your worship experience? How might you pray for your worship experience?
4. How much should generational and cultural differences play a role in planning and preparing worship?
5. How do you ‘evidence’ passion in your worship experiences? What differences in expressions of passion do you notice in worship?

ACTION STEP:

1. Use the scale below to evaluate your level of expectancy or how prepared you were as you came to worship today:

1- I gave it no thought, I just came.

2-

3-

4-

5- I thought about church, and who I might see there, or what I might do there.

6-

7-

8-

9-

10- I prayed intentionally for God to speak and minister to me as I opened myself to His voice/will.

2. Pray everyday for next week’s worship, ask God to prepare you for what you will encounter. Pray for your Pastor, who will be delivering God’s word. Pray for the staff that will be leading the day’s planned activities. Pray for the people who will be attending worship with you. Pray specifically about what you will contribute to your worship experience next week. Pray in agreement that you will do what God tells you through worship.