

“Worship?”

Exodus 20:2-6; Deuteronomy 10:17-21;  
Romans 12:1-6; Luke 4:5-8

Pastor Norman Fowler  
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow  
January 20, 2013

Worship. As I was thinking about that word this week, I thought about where I hear it used. I hear it at church. I hear it when somebody’s talking about church. Anywhere else? It’s one of those words that has dropped out of our general vocabulary. In fact, when I generally hear it, it means an hour on Sunday morning. People are talking about a certain time and place and the fact that people gather. So, I wanted to think a little bit more about what worship is.

It’s a little awkward because it’s a little weird to be doing something and thinking about it at the same time. But, if we are going to think about worship in worship, that’s the way it’s going to be. So what is worship? It’s more than just an hour on Sunday morning. There’s more behind it. God wasn’t saying, and Jesus wasn’t saying to the devil, “I just have to go one hour on Sunday morning and that solves this problem.” There’s more to worship.

So as I do, I looked at meanings. Some of the meanings of the word “worship,” especially in Greek, mean *to be in the presence of* or *to bow down to*. I think both of those lead us further in to what worship is all about.

It’s interesting to think about being in the presence of—thinking about being in the presence of God. We come into the presence of God. Now that’s a little awkward because we are generally in the presence of God all the time, but I think worship is a time when we think about that and what it means. We enter in in a different way and ask God to be present in a way that we might experience something of God. But as I think about that—to be in the presence of God—I have a really high view of God because if I think of God as creator, I can’t really imagine what that means. I’ve seen some of the variety in this world. I’ve seen the wonder of the stars and the wonder of very small things. It’s incredible! And so is our God. God is so big, so incredible; the thought of being in God’s presence is incredible. In fact, in the Old Testament, when they built a temple, they made the Holy of Holies as a place where they thought God would come and reside. It was so special that only one person, the High Priest, could go in once a year on the Day of Atonement. He had to have a rope tied around his foot so that if anything happened to him while he was in there, they could pull him out. We don’t often think about how incredibly special it is to be in the presence of God. And yet we come to worship in God’s presence, and the only reason we can come into the presence of God is because God invites us here.

Let’s put some shape to worship, more than just thinking of it as a set of concepts. When we are thinking about coming into God’s presence, we think of coming to the creator of all that is, the one in charge, the King. When I thought about the King, I thought, “Oh, it’s kind of like coming into the presence of a king.” The image that comes to my mind, since I’ve never really had any experience with kings, is a mythological

king—King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. As I thought about it, there is a way in which it is very similar. Think about being one of those Knights of the Round Table. What's that like?

First, you have to have an invitation. If legend is right, you had to do something special to get there, perhaps, but we know that the special thing that happened was what God did to get us there. So in this case, it's a little different, but it is an invitation to come to the table. And we even have a table to gather around. So there's that invitation to come to the table.

We also know that to really sit at the table, the king decides that you're ready to be a knight. So we have that idea of someone being knighted, and now they are ready to come to the table. Do we have anything like that? You might say baptism, in which we recognize that we are claimed and we are part of the table that God has set.

As those knights come to be knighted, what they are saying is, "You are my King." There is a sense of giving our allegiance. That's the bowing down part of all those meanings of worship. Who do I give my allegiance to? Who am I following? Whose am I? Who's going to give me direction in my life? The King.

As legend has it, the king gave those who were members of the Round Table a pledge, and the pledge included things like always standing on the side of what is right, helping the downtrodden, being generous, helping damsels in distress. There was a whole long list of what they were to be as a Knight of the Round Table. As they came, then, they came both to give their allegiance to the king and to honor the king. In fact, just responding to the invitation is to honor the one who gave it. I think there's a parable about something like that—about coming to the table and honoring the one who set it. So there's the allegiance and there's honor.

Maybe as they sat around the table, they would all tell the king how grateful they were to be his subjects, his knights. Maybe they even sang a song like "He's a Jolly Good Fellow" or something like that. But, there was an attention to who the king was and a thanksgiving for being able to be part of that.

Maybe as they sat around the table, they would share stories. Perhaps those were the beginnings of those stories we have of all the different knights. In that is a sense of making mistakes, and of trying to do the king's work—a little bit like confession. So we can think about the ideas of allegiance and honor that are there; the invitation and the privilege it is to be there.

In fact, I can think of being a child in that kingdom and dreaming of being able to be one of the knights around the Round Table. We still, I think, in our own imaginations want to be Knights of the Round Table. It's something that captures our imaginations. At least it captured mine. I think about worship. Worship is our opportunity to come and be around the table, to be God's people. It's a privilege to come and to worship. It's a privilege to give our allegiance and praise to God.

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus knew what the devil was asking: where is your allegiance? And Jesus said, "Worship God, and God alone." That's where we show our allegiance. That's where we state it, we make it known. It's interesting Jesus adds one little thing at the end of that: "And serve only Him." You see, if you're going to be a Knight of the Round Table and you are going to take the pledge, you are actually expected to live it out, to serve only him. I think it's the same thing. We come and are given this gift. We say what we want to do and we hear what he has to tell us. He describes how we are his people and what that means, and then we go forth to live it.

Perhaps we should conclude worship with words like, "Finally, build up your strength in union with the Lord and by means of his mighty power put on the whole armor that God gives you so that you will be able to stand up against the devil's evil tricks, for we are not fighting against human beings, but against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers of this dark age. So put on God's armor now." (*Ephesians 6:10-13*)

Maybe we should leave worship thinking about that—putting on God's armor now. Putting on the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes that deliver the gospel of peace, the shield of faith that protects us, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of God's Word. All of this is undergirded by prayer that enables us to go forth and to do God's work wearing that armor.

The interesting thing for me is that as I think about putting on God's armor, it's a great image, an image of setting forth onto a quest. So each week we can leave worship on the quest to do God's work, to do God's will, to spread the goodness and grace of God. But if your experience of each week is anything like mine, you come back at the end of the week feeling a little dinged up, a little worn down. How grateful I am that we have this opportunity to come and again let our souls be burnished, our lives be readied to take off once again to be God's knights, to be God's people taking forth the gospel of peace and the grace and goodness of God into the world.

So in worship we get to remember the awesome nature of God and that God is with us. We realign ourselves with God, restate that allegiance, recognize the praise that is due God and the words that God gives us, and receive the direction and guidance that we might go out, armored with faith, to do God's work in the world. I invite you to put on the whole armor of God and to go forth into the week. Amen.

Gracious God, we are thankful that as grand and glorious, as incredible and unknowable as you are, you have not left us, but come to us. You invite us to gather around a table to be your people, to become your knights, to become the people who can live forth your will and then come back, recognizing what a wonder it is to be your people, to realign ourselves, to be inspired again, to think again on the grace you've given and the encouragement you offer, and to acknowledge that you really do go with us, like armor. Lord, gird us. Prepare us for a new week, to be yours and to do your work. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.