

“Attending to Worship”

1 Chronicles 16:7-36; Hebrews 10:19-25;
John 12:19-26

Pastor Norman Fowler
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow
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I was wondering, are there ever those times in your life when you sit on your couch and you just don't really want to get up again? Coming home after a long day's work, there are times when it feels pretty good. Perhaps we can then turn on the TV and, I think the term is “veg out” or something along those lines. It's interesting how easy it is to do that. Maybe it's a little passé to say that it's easy to become a couch potato, or to sit on the couch and watch TV, because these days there's another term. We can also become “mouse potatoes.” So if we don't just come sit in front of the TV, we might come sit in front of the computer and plug in. Once we have done that, it's sometimes hard to get up and get going again. We might have something else planned, but after we've sat there for a while, who wants to go do it?

I'm wondering if that isn't the case on some Sunday mornings. It's a little hard to not want to just stay in bed, stay in front of the computer, stay on the couch. So why do we not do that? Why do we attend rather than attending to our computer or our lack of energy or our need for rest? Why do we attend worship instead? What is it about worship that is more important than doing all those other things? I think it's more than just not wanting to be a potato. It is that we are coming to seek God. We are coming into something different.

Sometimes, as much as I know something is going to be good, it's hard to get up the energy to go do it. Afterwards, I'll say, “Wow! That was great!” And so it is with worship. It's helpful, I think, to remember why we are here. We are here to attend because we want to pay attention, we want to seek God. Hebrews suggests we can come in confidence and assurance. We can recognize that others may forget to gather together, but we are called to do this. We come and attend because God is encouraging us to be here and because somewhere deep in our souls we know we need to seek God, to recognize God's presence with us and among us. And so we come.

It's interesting that in this verse from the Gospel Jesus doesn't directly talk about worship, but it feels like as Jesus recognizes some people coming to worship it prompts him to think about what it means to follow Him. There are a couple of things about that. It prompts us, perhaps, too. Jesus says it's like a seed that must die, let go of all it has been, to grow again. Worship is a time when we can come and let go of the world to allow God to be with us. It's why we do all these strange things. Where else in our lives do we do all the things that we do on a Sunday morning? Hear a Call to Worship; do responsive readings. Where else do we pray together on a consistent basis or sing songs together? All these things are something different because it is different to worship God. Our God is incredibly different than the world we come out of and asks something different of us.

Wherever we come from, as we come we have that confidence and assurance we can come from a week where we've felt sick, where we've felt dinged up, where we've felt overwhelmed. Or we can come from a week where we've felt wonderful joy and thanksgiving and want to bring it with us. It doesn't matter whether we need to have our armor burnished up a little bit or whether we're bursting with joy. We can come because we know in God's presence we can sing God's praises, we can remember who God is, we can give thanks, we can let go of our wrongs and the wrongs done us, we can remember again that God is there

cheering us on—"I love you." We can come and reignite our lives, our souls as we give our allegiance again to God and hear what God is about. We can find all these elements in the passages from Chronicles and Hebrews about how David worshiped and how worship was thought about in Hebrews. We do this because Jesus invites us to let go of the world and be immersed in good soil that we might become the very people that God made us to be.

So we attend worship and we are attending to worship—paying attention to what we do. We come not so that we can just learn a song. It's not just to say a few words. It's not just to come together, but it is in all of that to know God is present and to reach our hearts out to God and to open our hearts to God and to again acknowledge the grace of God.

We have all these elements, this flow, to worship where we start with the Call and work our way through praises for who God is and confessing who we are and our need for God, and a thanksgiving that God is there for us. Then we hear and listen to what God has to say, and we think about it together, and then we get toward the end. I know a lot of churches have moved the offering up further in the service, but the reason I have a hard time with that is that at the end of the service it's our turn to see how worship has attended to us. We have come and opened our hearts and offered our praises and given our thanksgiving; what now do we feel led to do. It's always helpful if some of you give some of your resources to help the church continue its work, but really the offering is much more than that. It's that time when we begin to think about what Jesus said: "Come and follow me. And when you follow me you leave the world behind and think about what it is to serve Christ." The book of Hebrews talked about that a little bit. Part of what it is to serve Christ is to be together and to encourage one another, even to provoke one another to good works. It is in our offering that we begin to think about what we are feeling provoked to do. We begin to think about where we are called in this new week.

So to help us think about that, you will notice that along the inside aisle there are some blank pieces of paper. I invite you to simply think about how you feel called to serve Christ this week. What is my response to my encounter with Christ, to worship, what can I do? These can be all kinds of things. It can be anything from noticing the beauty around me and thanking God for it more consistently or other acts of gratitude. It can be some way in which I know that there's somebody in my life that I need to approach in some way, with friendship, with forgiveness, with help, with hope. We can do something like deciding to do a particular devotion this week or spend more time in prayer. How is it we would leave here to serve Christ? Write that down, and when you are done with it you can take it with you so you can remember it, or, if you can remember it without taking it with you, I invite you to put it in the offering plate as an offering to God, as part of what we do in response to the grace that God has given us.

As we attend worship and as we attend to God, God is also attending to us and calling us to serve, to follow, to be His, and to be different than the world around us. Amen.

Gracious God, we are thankful that we can come and worship you, that we can come and seek you. We can raise our voices in praise and thanksgiving, recognizing your grace in the face of our need. We can hear how you call us and encourage us and lead us. Lord, as you lead us, help us see our own lives and how you might work in and through us. Lord, let us be your faithful disciples. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.