

“In Spirit and In Truth”
Exodus 3:7-15; Hebrews 12:22-29;
John 4:20-24

Pastor Norman Fowler
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow
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This is the fourth Sunday in a series on worship. We have talked about the invitation or call to worship that God has given us and how we are called around a table to give our allegiance and honor to God. Then we talked about some of the ways we do that. We talked about the nature of the things we do in worship. Last week we talked about how easy it is to be swayed to worship others. There are other things in our lives that would take our allegiance, take our honor, and we can easily give honor and allegiance to those things. In this final week of our series on worship, I want to rethink some of that as we recognize what a gift it is to be invited in to worship.

In the passage from Exodus, one of the interesting things about the freeing of the Israelites is that they were being freed to worship. One of the things God tells Moses is to tell Pharaoh that my people need to go out into the wilderness so they can worship. There's this idea of being freed to worship. We don't think about that as often as we might because we feel free to worship. In fact, we feel so free to worship I think sometimes we forget about how valuable it is. We are invited into worship, a place where we come to remember the awesome nature of who God is. It's really an incredible thing to have this opportunity to worship together and to remember who God is.

In Hebrews, it says we are invited to come give our acceptable worship in awe and respect to God. Today we are going to think about what it is to give our acceptable worship to God. What is central to that? I think that is what Jesus and the woman at the well are talking about. What is acceptable worship to God? What do we do? What Jesus ends up saying is that acceptable worship is to worship God in spirit and in truth. It's not about whether you do it on Mt. Gerizim or do it in Jerusalem. It's not exactly how you worship; it's what you bring into worship, what you expect to be in worship. We come to worship in spirit and in truth. I want to think about what is it to give God our acceptable worship in spirit and in truth.

What does it mean to worship in spirit? I went to a basketball game yesterday, so I was thinking about spirit. We could chant G-O-D, Go God! So we could think about that kind of spirit. If we think about what it said in Hebrews about giving God our acceptable worship in awe and respect, this doesn't quite fit with the idea of cheering for God. Yet I wonder if we take the sense of awe and respect, the sense of wonder that Hebrews is talking about, and we take the spark that is in the idea of cheering and put them together, if we are not beginning to get at what it means to worship God in spirit.

The Greek word for spirit means “wind” or “breath,” so you have that sense of the wind moving or the breath that gives life. There's a sense of movement, energy, and power in the word “spirit.” We think about God breathing into Adam and giving life. There's that idea of giving energy and dynamism, power, life that is in the spirit. It's the coming together of the awe, the wonder, and the idea of the spark of life, the power, the spirit. We come to worship in spirit.

As I was thinking about it, it feels like we are asked to come and be in the midst of what it means to be alive—that ineffable essence of life. I happen to like that phrase because the word ineffable is the kind of a word that sounds like what it means. You can't really get your hands around it. It almost has that breath in it. The ineffable essence of life— isn't that what spirit is like? We can't really understand what it is, but it's central. It's what really gives life to life. Sometimes I wonder if we should move around a little bit more, or do something more to remind ourselves that we are coming in the midst of the ineffable essence of life that God has given us and to be with the one who is ineffable. Come in spirit and in truth.

Then, there is truth. Not only do we want to come with this ineffable essence of life, that sense of dynamism that God has brought, but we want to come in truth. What is truth? In Greek, the word means non-concealment. However, when I come to church, I often want to put on my best face. Yet I think what the scripture is telling us is that we don't have to put on a face. When we come to worship, we are coming in truth. We are coming in the sense of non-concealment. We don't have to put on a face. We don't have to try to be something we're not.

There are times to try to put on things. As we go out into the world, we try to put on the mantle of Christ. We try to do what God calls us to do. But when we come to worship, God invites us to come in truth without trying to put on anything. Oftentimes I realize there's nothing that I can really conceal from God, and yet I think as I live through the week I begin to try to put on airs, I try to put on ways of being, put on a face. It's easy to think I'm coming to God and that's what God sees. I don't think so. I think God sees right through it, and invites us to let it go and to come and worship in non-concealment, to come and worship in truth as we are. We can be thankful for the journey we've made and all the growth that we've had, and recognize all that we want to do, knowing that we are somewhere in between. We can recognize the mistakes we've made—that's one reason why we do confession—and we can recognize the grace that we've been given. We can come and be ourselves, and sit in the ineffable essence of God, in the midst of that life and dynamism of who God is.

There's a wonderful thing in thinking about God as being wind or breath because when you take that breath in, it inspires and when you let it out there's almost a shout of joy as you are gripped with the enthusiasm of who God is. God is not concealed here. God is trustworthy. God is the one we can come and be with, and we begin to be led into something that is much beyond our own understanding. In a way it's ineffable. It's something we can't completely grab hold of, yet we know its description. One of those descriptions comes out of Hebrews—that unshakable kingdom. As we let go of all the faces and weight and all the things we think we might be or should be or think we've become and simply allow ourselves to sit in God's presence as the very essence we are, trusting in God, we begin to enter in to God's kingdom. It's God who engulfs us and begins to shape our lives and help us see a new world, a new way of seeing, who begins to make us part of God's kingdom. We get to begin to enter into that unshakable kingdom—the kingdom of God—as the people of God.

Our gift is that we may come to worship as a way of entry into that kingdom, as we come and worship in spirit and in truth. That's our invitation: to come and worship in spirit and in truth. Amen.