

Worship Plus 2
Psalm 100; Luke 6:12, 10:27; John 20:19-22
April 30, 2017
First Presbyterian Church

Luke 6:12

Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God.

Luke 10:27

He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

John 20:19-22

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

Sermon

Though I am the one delivering this morning's sermon, the truth is that I am speaking on behalf of the almost 30 staff members and elders that participated in our leadership retreat back in early March. You may remember Dr. Tom Tewell was our retreat leader... and that after spending about 24 hours with us in Montreat, Tom came to Hickory to teach Sunday school and preach in worship on Sunday.

Well, I think I speak for all of us when I say we were truly blessed by Tom's leadership... and by one another's company... and we all came away with a newfound appreciation for this congregation... for the people in this congregation and for the core values we share around nurturing our children's and youth... caring for one another... and for mission and outreach on this corner and beyond.

So, when I was pondering what I might preach on this Confirmation Sunday, I was reminded of something we talked about a good bit on the retreat... and have continued to talk about in the weeks since. It's an idea called "Worship Plus 2" and this morning I simply want to share this idea with you – not in great detail because we'll hear more about it later – but our staff and elders found the idea so helpful... that today – as these young people profess their faith and as we all recommit ourselves as followers of Jesus Christ – today seemed to be a good day to introduce it.

Worship Plus 2 is a very simple, yet profound way to think about the actual application of our faith to our daily life. Once God has called us and we commit to follow Jesus, what does our

daily life look like? Or perhaps another way to say this is that Worship Plus 2 is a way to think about the basic rhythm of the Christian life... it's a way to talk about the fundamental practices which mark the lives of those who follow Jesus.

Well, always the first word is "Worship." Worship lies at the heart of who we are as Christians. Worship can take many forms, of course – it can be corporate... it can be private... it can happen in small groups... in homes... out in nature... but worship is so essential that the Westminster Shorter Catechism speaks of it in its very first question. What is the chief end of man? And the answer: The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy God forever.

Our opening call to worship this morning was a responsive version of Psalm 100. The psalm begins with exhortations to worship: "make a joyful noise... worship the Lord with gladness... come into God's presence with singing." And then the psalm gives the reason we should do this: "the Lord is God." God made us. We belong to God. We are God's people... and the sheep of God's pasture.

You may know that there is an ongoing debate in the church about the purpose of worship. We Christians in the West seem to think we need a purpose for everything we do... that everything we do must somehow accomplish some goal... and naturally we apply that to worship. Others respond saying "No, no, no... worship needs no purpose other than getting us to "look up" - to turn our eyes to the One who created us to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. Some even have even begun to talk about worship as a "holy waste of time." Well, to me that seems reason enough – to give us time and permission each day – every week – to "look up" from the screens of our devices... to look up from the circumstances of our lives and our constant thinking about the next thing we have to do... to look up and see that God is real... that God is present that God is always at work.

Looking up can bring us joy – even when we are struggling, so "make a joyful noise to the Lord." Looking up reminds us that God can be trusted, so worship the Lord with gladness – no matter what is going on in our life and world. We can come into God's presence with singing because no matter what we are dealing with... God is still God and His steadfast love still reigns forever.

Worship is essential, my friends... so essential that right now I'm going to risk moving from preaching to meddling... and possibly offend some of you. I hope that's not the case, but I feel like I need to address something that we are wrestling with as a congregation. As most of you know, this summer we will worship in one service from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend. This was the recommendation of our Worship Committee... then approved by our session... that we would alternate between this sanctuary and the fellowship hall each week... also alternating between a more traditional style and our Kairos style of worship. The primary reason for this is to bring our two worshipping communities together. During the program year we worship in two different spaces at the same time... and we have heard so many of you say you miss being together... that you miss seeing each other... that we saw these summer services as an opportunity to all come together.

But what I have been hearing is that some of us have already decided we will only come to worship half of the Sundays this summer... the Sundays when the service will be in the place and the style that we happen to prefer. Well, if this is in fact true for you... and you have already made that decision... then I ask you to consider what this says about how you view what worship really is? And I ask you to ponder what this says about how you view our congregation... and what it really means to be a community of faith. The Apostle Paul writes that we are like a body with many different parts, yet it is still one body. So, can we not find a way to worship – to “look up” - both in this sanctuary and in the fellowship hall? Can we not find a way to “look up” – whether we are singing out of a hymnal accompanied by pipe organ OR from words on a screen accompanied by guitars? Might those of you who much prefer sanctuary worship use this opportunity to try to understand what makes those Kairos folks tick? And might those of you who prefer Kairos try to understand why this space and this style of worship is so important to many of us? Friends, worship is SO absolutely essential to our lives as followers of Jesus... we need to gather together to “look up” to God every chance we get... in every place we can.

So worship is the essential, non-negotiable job of the Christian. It is our core reason for being... our primary activity as followers of Jesus. And flowing out of our worship there is a rhythm to the Christian life which is much like the rhythm of “breathing” - which is what you are doing right now - breathing. You are in haling and you are exhaling... inhaling and exhaling. It’s what we do as human beings to live... and it’s what we do as Christians to grow and thrive – we inhale God’s love and we exhale God’s love. You’ve probably already guessed that this is the “Plus 2” in Worship Plus 2 – this is the call... in each of our lives... to always have some way we are inhaling God’s love and some way we are exhaling God’s love. Let’s talk first about inhaling. I’m sure you remember the so-called “Miracle on the Hudson” in which in January 2009, Captain Sully Sullenberger’s US Airways flight struck a flock of Canadian geese just after takeoff, disabling the plane’s engines. Twenty two seconds later he communicates distress to the tower... and after ninety very tense seconds he crash-lands the plane in the Hudson River saving all of the passengers and crew... not to mention all those people on the ground the plane passes just 900 feet above the George Washington Bridge).

Perhaps you have seen the movie or maybe heard the recording of those fateful minutes in which he gathered information and assessed his options and made the decisions that ultimately saved so many lives. And in interview after interview following this event he was always asked: “How did you do it?” And his answer was always the same – it was his lifetime of training and preparation that equipped him to do what he did. Or to use our word – it was his lifetime of “inhaling” information and practice and experience that provided what he needed when he needed it most.

Surely we can say the same about our lives of faith. To use a familiar image: Surely we need to make regular spiritual deposits to our bank of faith... so that when something happens and we need spiritual resources, we have something there to draw on. Flight after flight... training session after training session... year after year... Captain Sullenberger made regular deposits in his bank... and when he was tested he was prepared and able to do something that many think of as a miracle.

So, inhaling God's love is part of how we apply our faith to our daily lives, but that's not all. The second part of the "Plus 2" is exhaling God's love. I remember as a kid having competitions with friends to see who could go underwater and hold their breath the longest. Summer afternoons we would spend hours doing it... and we got pretty good, but eventually we all came up... eventually we all needed to exhale. So it is in the rhythm of following Jesus – we breathe in his love... and then we breathe that love out in service to others. Along with the breath of the Holy Spirit inside of us, God has given each and every one of us gifts to be used for God's glory... GIFTS given... that we can might join with Christ in his mission in the world... LOVE given... that we might exhale it into the world.

Now, it is my fear that at this point in the sermon some of you have about had enough and may be saying to yourself "I hear ya, Whit... but I just can't do any more. I just can't add one more thing onto my plate that is already piled so high." And it's true – I realize the danger with a sermon like this is that some of you might walk out of here feeling demoralized rather than encouraged... feeling even more weighed down rather than freed up. Well, if that even begins to describe you let me just say three words that Tom Tewell said to us: Bite Size Involvement. Bite size involvement. In other words, if right now you aren't making regular spiritual deposits in your faith bank, find one small way to begin inhaling God's love on a regular basis – a Bible study, a small group, meditating on Scripture, a devotional program – just some way to begin inhaling God's love. And if at this time you really aren't committed to some intentional form of Christian service... some intentional way of exhaling God's love... then pray about it... and talk to your friends who are involved... or let Heather or me make some suggestions. Find some "bite size" way to use what God has given you for the good of others and the glory of Christ. And if right now you can't even imagine finding the time and the energy to do either of these things... well, that's where the Lego comes in.

Take your Lego now and notice the little knobs/circles on the top. Now imagine that those circles contain all of the activities and responsibilities and commitments you have in your life... imagine that all your time and energy and attention is represented by those four or six or eight circles. Well, for some of us those circles are so filled up that there's really no room for anything else... no energy for inhaling... no time for exhaling... and it's like there is another Lego sitting on top of us so that the only option is to go one direction... the direction we are already going. But if we are able to open up say two of those circles for something else... for another Lego... the possibilities begin to increase... bringing opportunities for building else... opportunities to grow in directions that the Spirit would have us grow.

Opening up those spaces in our lives is difficult, I know. I know I have to step back and recalibrate my priorities all the time... I'm constantly trying to keep the main thing the main thing in my life. And that's the purpose of Worship Plus 2 – To help keep us balanced and growing in faith over the long haul... over the many changing seasons of our lives.

Finally this. If you're like me and continually need to look at your priorities... If you're like me and often find those priorities need to change... then allow me to suggest that we learn how to say a "Holy No!" I heard that last week (Holy No) and really like it – Sometimes we need to say a "Holy No" so that we can say a "Holy yes" to worship... to inhaling God's love into our hearts... and to exhaling that love into all the world!