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 March 1, 2020
 First Sunday Lent
 Worship

Walking with Jesus: Worship
Psalm 95:1-7

Listen/Lectio Divina---Word/Phrase, Image/Memory, what God saying?

O come, let us sing to the Lord;
 let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
² Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
 let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
³ For the Lord is a great God,
 and a great King above all gods.
⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth;
 the heights of the mountains are his also.
⁵ The sea is his, for he made it,
 and the dry land, which his hands have formed.
⁶ O come, let us worship and bow down,
 let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!
⁷ For he is our God,
 and we are the people of his pasture,
 and the sheep of his hand.

PRAY

Today—first Sunday of Lent—40 days, 6 weeks of preparation for Easter
 As we heard on Ash Wed---it's 40 days because it's a *wilderness time*,
 Just like *Jesus* going into the wilderness for 40 days fasting,
 Where he was tempted by the Devil
 And that was his preparation for ministry!

We too are entering a wilderness time,
 A time of preparation of *repentance, fasting, giving up, learning, and turning our heart* to God. A time to **REMEMBER**—*who we are and who God is*

Starts with **ASH WEDNESDAY**
 a reminder of our mortality, our frailty as human beings,
 who began as dust, and will return to dust.

But also a reminder who we belong to---*we belong to Jesus*
 That's why the cross on our foreheads is so special—
 and those who didn't receive it on Wednesday *can do so today after worship!*

Lent is also a time to ***WALK WITH JESUS***---our source of hope and strength
 Walking with God a common theme throughout the Bible
 God walked with *Adam and Eve* in the Garden
 God told *Abram* to walk with him and go to a new land
Moses walked up Mt. Sinai to see God
 Moses told the people of God to walk with God

In the N. T., walking with God is also key to faith
 Paul talks about *walking in newness* of life
 And Jesus when he says *Follow Me, he is saying: walk with me*
 That Greek word is *akalutheo*, which means to walk alongside, to go on a journey.

That is LENT—a JOURNEY, walking with Jesus

It is also why we are singing *Precious Lord, take my Hand* today---one of my
 favorite hymns. Listen to the beautiful words:

*Precious Lord, take my hand
 Lead me on, let me stand
 I'm tired, I'm weak, I'm worn
 Through the storm, through the night
 Lead me on to the light
 Take my hand precious Lord, lead me home*

That is WHO WE ARE---people who need to *take the hand of Jesus*,
 and walk with Him, not just during Lent, but all the time.
 We are tired, we are weak, we are worn.
 And we need Jesus to lead us through the darkness and the storms of life,
 So that we can be led to His light, and one day to our eternal home.

All of us are walking with Jesus throughout these six weeks,
 to prepare our hearts for Easter,
 but also to take the ideas and dreams that came into our hearts and our community
 during February when we were focused on loving God and neighbor with healthy
 hearts, and ***putting those things into action.***
 It's about not just talking the talk of faith,

We are called to ***WALK THE WALK***.

Speaking of walking,

This Lent I am going to be referring to a good book by Pastor Adam Hamilton, called ***The Walk: Five Essential Practices of the Christian Life***.

You can find it on Amazon or Kindle.

This book talks about 5 practices:

worship, study, serve, give, and sharing faith,

all key things for a vibrant life of faith.

All key to our Walk with Jesus.

The first one is ***Worship***—

which is what I want to spend time on today.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF when you hear the word worship?.....

Worship is so ***central to our faith,***

and so central to our Lenten journey.

If we don't worship during Lent, we really miss something, right?

What happens if we don't acknowledge the beginning of Lent, don't we miss something?

This is why I am ***offering ashes*** to anyone who missed them, and we are celebrating ***communion*** again today.

If we don't celebrate Holy Week—

with Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday, we really do miss something, don't we?

Doesn't Easter mean so, so much more

when we have worshipped all along the journey of Lent?

When we have really walked with Jesus?

So, I encourage you, ***if you have to miss a Sunday of Lent,***

to get online and listen to or read the messages from worship,

and ask for the office to send you a bulletin, so that you can worship at home!

Take the time to experience this season of Lent,

To savor each and every week of it.

I encourage you to take home ***the March calendar*** and put it on your refrigerator—and read those verses,

and ask those questions in prayer and meditation!

Take home the bulletin each week, and read the *daily meditation*—these things are powerful ways to prepare our hearts for Easter!

And what about today's scripture for worship?

Well, today we have this beautiful Psalm—*Psalm 95*

This who Psalm is about us—being a *LIVING ALLELUIA*

About us saying Hooray God! Way to God!

We love you!

We praise you!

We thank you!

In fact, that's what *WORSHIP IS ALL ABOUT, right?*

Those phrases that are so important in our everyday relationships,

And they are so, so important in our relationship with God!

We need to say things like,

I'M SORRY.

I LOVE YOU.

THANK YOU.

Sadly, we all know of relationships where these words are not said, and we suffer for that, don't we?

Presbyterian author Anne Lamott says that the two most powerful prayers in all the world are *Help me, Help me, and Thank you, Thank you!* I think there's some real truth in that, don't you?

In his book, Hamilton talks about how worship is *our appropriate response to our Creator God—it's what we are made to do!*

We are made to say

I love you God! Thank you God! Help me God!

Adam Hamilton, *The Walk: Five Essential Practices of the Christian Life*, Abingdon: Nashville, 2019. Pg. 19-20.

He also talks about how the words for worship in the Bible are all about *bowing down, and humbling ourselves* before God, Which is exactly what we see in Psalm 95, and in fact we see it throughout the Psalms very clearly, but all throughout the Bible when people encounter God!

He mentions that the old English word for worship means to ***recognize someone as worthy***.

Adam Hamilton, *The Walk: Five Essential Practices of the Christian Life*, Abingdon: Nashville, 2019. Pg. 21.

In seminary, I had to memorize something called ***the WESTMINSTER Catechism***, from the Presbyterian Book of Confessions.

And they are questions and answers about faith, and the first question is ***What is the chief end of man?***

And you know what the answer is?

To glorify God, and enjoy Him forever!

In other words, ***our main purpose*** in life:

Is to worship God—praise, and love, and thank, and enjoy!

Our ancestors of the faith have been worshipping God since day one.

Jews worship on their Sabbath, from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown, and ***Christians worship on the Sabbath***, on Sunday—the day that Jesus rose from death.

We do all this worship because we honor the seventh day of Creation, when ***God rested*** from the labor of creation, and just enjoyed it.

WE ENJOY GOD when we worship---

do you enjoy God when you worship?

I know I sure do!

DO YOU ENJOY WORSHIP? HOW? WHY.....

That's why ***all of us leading worship work so hard on it---***

so that it will be a time of refreshment and renewal,

so that we can offer ourselves to God in worship,

and receive all the benefits God has for us.

We can receive the love of God—

so that we can take that out into the world when we leave this place.

It's like ***welcoming the light of Christ*** in at the beginning,

and ***taking the light of Christ*** out when we leave!

We come in and receive God's light---so we can take it with us!

In the BOOK OF ACTS, the very first Christians worshipped together all the time.

In Acts 2 it says what they did:

After Pentecost, when the power of Holy Spirit fell upon Jesus' followers, giving them the power to speak in all different languages about God, three thousand people were baptized, and the early church began.

And what did they do? *Acts 2:42-47* says **this**:

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' **teaching** and **fellowship**, to the **breaking of bread** and the **prayers**.*

⁴³ *Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and **signs** were being done by the apostles.* ⁴⁴ *All who believed were together and had all things in common;*

⁴⁵ *they would **sell** their possessions and goods and **distribute** the proceeds^[i] to all, as any had need.* ⁴⁶ *Day by day, as they spent **much time together** in the temple,*

*they **broke bread** at home^[k] and ate their food with glad and generous^[l] hearts,* ⁴⁷ ***praising** God and having the goodwill of all the people.*

And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

In other words, **worship was NOT A SPECTATOR SPORT!**

They did not come into a building to be entertained.

They came to worship to participate.

They prayed together, they received communion and shared a meal,

they gave offerings to support those in need,

they praised God,

And God added to their numbers.

Do we realize that worship is participatory?

Do you feel like you participate in worship?

Worship is something we DO.

It is not something we receive, or that we watch.

It is not something that entertains us, it involves us.

When we hear the **offertory** played or sung, it is an offering, not a performance.

It is a gift to God, and our praise and thanks for it, it a gift to God.

We share **common prayers and creeds**, not because we have to, but because we want to participate in the prayers of worship!

We stand and sit and come forward when able—

because worship is something we do

AND WE DO IT TOGETHER!

Hamilton reminds us that people worship much less frequently these days.

Sundays used to be for worship,

now more people are shopping on Sundays, or at sporting events.

But worship is so ***KEY TO STAYING SPIRITUALLY HEALTHY!***

It's kind of like ***CHARGING YOUR PHONE***—when you do, it lasts, right?
Worship charges our spiritual batteries.

Sadly, most people attend church about once a month,
but imagine the power of attending every week!

Studies have shown that regular worship improves physical and mental health!
I know it changes my life—even on the days I feel terrible when I arrive,
something happens in worship that gives me hope, and strength,
energy and enthusiasm for when I leave this place!

What about you?

WHAT DOES WORSHIP DO FOR YOU?

Hamilton challenged his large congregation in Kansas City
to make an “A” in worship—and attend ***90% of the time*** when possible,
missing 5 Sundays a year or less.

What if we were to strive for that?

Sounds difficult, but imagine God's power in our lives!

Psalm 95 reminds us that we worship God not just for what we can get from it.

We worship God because of ***WHO GOD IS!***

God is the Creator! God is our Keeper! God is our Shepherd!

Worship inspires us to be grateful, and say Thank you!

Hamilton has this quote from in his book, on pg. 32

Dr. Murali Doraiswamy of Duke University Medical School wrote:

“If gratitude were a drug, it would be the world's best-selling product with a health maintenance indication for every major organ system”.

Isn't that true?

Isn't that powerful?

This is backed up all throughout scripture.

Jesus spoke about giving thanks to God, and he did it.

In fact, he modeled it in the ***Lord's Prayer***.

Paul speaks about it throughout Philippians and 1 Thessalonians.

In ***1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*** he says that we should
rejoice always and pray without ceasing.

Imagine if we did that?

Can you imagine the power in our lives?

Last Sunday I mentioned *Philippians 4*, which encourages us to think on those things that are pure, and holy, worthy of praise.

Instead—WHAT DO WE USUALLY FOCUS ON?

Worry! Pain! Fear! Our laundry list of to-dos, right? Yet, Paul tells us in *Philippians 4*, that if we will focus on what is good, and gratitude, the peace of Christ, which passes all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds!

I need that, what about you?

Worship is not just something we do here on Sundays.

It is also something ***WE DO ON OUR OWN***.

And one of the primary ways we do it is ***through PRAYER***.

Prayer is beyond powerful, but you know how many people pray regularly? Only about 41% of men, and 59% of women say they pray each day.

Why?

Well, the usual answer is that ***we are too busy to pray***.

Well, what if we are too busy to NOT PRAY?

Isn't that the truth?

Can't we use the power of prayer in our lives, no matter who we are, or what we are going through? I sure can!

Prayer is kind of like ***plugging your heart into the outlet of God's power!***

If you just leave it sitting there, it doesn't do much good, right?

But when we plug into God's power, into the Holy Spirit—watch out!

Hamilton says that just like ***parents often have to remind kids to say 'Thank you'*** for a gift, or a compliment from someone---

We as adults need those same reminders.

We need to be REMINDED TO SAY THANK YOU TO GOD!

And one of the most powerful ways to do that is in prayer.

Of course, prayer has many different aspects,
There is ***Praise***---for who God is,
There is ***Thanks***—thank you God for blessings,

There is *Confession*—saying I’m sorry, please forgive me,
 There is *Petition*---please be with those who are hurting,
 And There is *Surrender*---Here I am, Lord. Use me, send me. I am yours.

One of the best models for this kind of prayer is *the Lord’s Prayer*,
 Because it has all these parts to it.
 But we can all pray prayers of
 praise, thanks, confession, petition, and surrender.

In fact, we can use our hand once again—
 and remember those 5 parts with our five fingers.
 But more importantly, we can use our hand to remind us to pray,
At least FIVE TIMES A DAY!
 To worship in prayer five times a day.
 And those times are pretty simple—maybe you already do it.
Once in the morning, Once in the evening, and Once at every meal.
 Simple, easy to remember.
 And life-changing my friends.
Life-changing.

So that’s a challenge to us.
 To *worship regularly* throughout this season of Lent.
 Let’s aim for an ‘A’, of 90%!
 And to *pray regularly* in our everyday lives, at last 5 times a day!

If we turn our hearts to God this Lent,
 We have *no idea just what kind of power we will find*,
 And what kind of peace we will experience!

Friends, Hear the *Good News of the Gospel* this First Sunday of Lent:
 May we *Walk with Jesus* throughout these 40 days,
 Taking the *hand of our Precious Lord*,
 And experiencing the *power of journeying with Jesus*.
 And for that, all God’s people said, Amen!