

**“Practicing Worship”**  
**Isaiah 6:1-8 and Colossians 3:12-17**  
**Pastor James York**  
**February 20, 2011, North Presbyterian Church**

**Scripture Readings**

**Isaiah 6:1-8**

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.’ The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: ‘Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!’ Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. <sup>7</sup>The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: ‘Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.’ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I; send me!’

**Colossians 3:12-17**

As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

**“Practicing Worship”**

William Temple says “to worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.”

Richard Foster says “to worship is to experience Reality, to touch Life. Worship is to know, to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community. Worship is a breaking into the glorious radiance of God, or better yet, being invaded by the glorious radiance of God. Worship is our response to the overtures of love from the heart of God.” In worship the Holy Spirit touches our spirit, igniting us with divine fire and sets us free.

Soren Kierkegaard says “worship is a drama.” God alone is the audience. The pastor and worship leaders are the prompters and encouragers of worship. You, me, all of us, are the actors in the drama of worship for God’s glory.

Pastor Robert Schnase says “God’s Spirit changes us through worship. Worship connects people to God and to one another.” True worshippers are eager, expectant and respond by allowing God’s Spirit to shape their lives. Worship is deliberately gathering to seek an encounter with God. We don’t attend worship to squeeze God into our lives; we seek to meld our lives into God’s. Worship is a time to think less about our personal agendas and more about God’s will. Worshippers encounter a fresh vision of God’s reality so God can reshape our lives and form us into the image of Jesus. Worship is looking

beyond what people do to see with the eyes of faith what God does. God actively deepens our relationship with God through worship. God uses worship to transform lives, heal wounded souls, renew hope, shape decisions, provoke change, inspire compassion and bind people to one another. Through worship God draws people to Jesus, deepens understanding and relationships and over time transforms lives. Your worship is to be passionate; expressing your intense desire to connect with God and yielding so God's word can shape you. Worship is never performance rather it is intentional devotion, celebration and love for God.

Pastor Gary Bullock says "Worship opens us to God so that God may change us and grow us in our faith." Gary uses the debate over applause in worship to explain worship. Gary preached, "We don't come to worship to be entertained. We don't come to worship for the performance. It's okay at times to applaud what happens in a worship service. But before we put our hands together, we need to stop and ask ourselves; Whom are we applauding? If we are applauding Jesus and God Almighty, that's a good thing. But those who are up here to help us worship aren't doing it for their glory. Don't applaud them for their performance. Applaud because they have moved you to a new level of your appreciation for your love of God, or because they have taken you to a new place in worship. Applause is a good thing at times. Then there are other times when the best response is simply to quietly sink into the moment that has been created for you by God through what someone presents as an offering in a time of worship."

John Ackerman my spiritual director says worship is "stop, look and listen." Stop, worship begins when we stop, give our entire attention to God and invite God into our life. Look, worship is taking a long loving look, noticing what God is doing in your life. Listen, worship is hearing God, sensing love, letting go and letting come. John is working with a team of people, including myself, to determine what the fourth word should be perhaps go, change, serve, transform, do, receive, decide.

Worship is a multifaceted mystery that resurrects the worshiper. Worship is unique to each person and beyond explanation. Worship takes us to a new place where we see God, our self and the world differently. Perhaps that's why the prophet Isaiah, the Apostle Paul and Jesus use imagery to guide us into worship.

Isaiah uses apocalyptic literature to portray one of his worship experiences. Apocalyptic literature says, I don't know how to describe this. This is beyond anything that words could ever say. So, let me use some words to try to help you understand how powerful this was in my life. Yet the words always fall short.

Isaiah wrote, **Isaiah 6:1a "Holy, Holy, Holy! It was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord."** You get the sense that Isaiah went to worship expectant, believing that God is indeed doing something significant in his midst, and thus he was ready to hear God and prepared for the Holy Spirit to move in unexpected ways. Isaiah made an intentional choice out of a sense of gratitude and thanksgiving to worship God. He considered it a privilege and an honor to worship God. Isaiah approached God in awe. Isaiah mentions a specific circumstance, the death of King Uzziah, and came to worship to perceive what God has to say about that, what God is doing, to perceive how God is going to make a difference in his life.

Isaiah wrote **Isaiah 6:1b "God was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of God's robe filled the Temple."** Revealing that God is present everywhere, that God is present with Isaiah.

Next Isaiah paints a picture of a new perspective of God he experienced. **Isaiah 6:2-4 Attending God were mighty seraphim, each having six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. They were calling out to each other, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Heaven's Armies! The whole earth is filled with God's glory!" Their voices shook the Temple to its foundations, and the entire building was filled with smoke."**

Seeing a new facet of the glory of God enabled Isaiah to see himself from a different angle. Isaiah continues **Isaiah 6:5 "Then I said, "It's all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. I have filthy lips, and I live among a people with filthy lips. Yet I have seen the King, the Lord of Heaven's Armies."** Isaiah has a sense for who he is in comparison to who God is. Up until this point worship is the work of Isaiah, preparing and coming to worship, seeking and perceiving God, becoming self aware and

opening himself to God. Now there is a shift as God graciously renews Isaiah. Isaiah describes it this way, **Isaiah 6:6-7** “**Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. He touched my lips with it and said, “See, this coal has touched your lips. Now your guilt is removed, and your sins are forgiven.”**”

In worship we discover the perfection of God, our imperfection and that God loves us even though we are sinful. When we open ourselves to God in worship God cleanses us, transforms and renews us into the person God created us to be, into God’s image. Worship is experiencing the renewing grace of God. But it doesn’t stop there. Isaiah goes on **Isaiah 6: 8** “**Then I heard the Lord asking, “Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?” I said, “Here I am. Send me.”**”

Worship renewed Isaiah. He began mourning, unsure how to live in the face of King Uzziah’s death, so he prepared for worship. Isaiah came to worship with gratitude, awe and expectant to perceive God’s guidance. Isaiah worshipped with passion. He observed and listened. Isaiah saw God and himself differently. God forgave and ignited the passion in Isaiah. God invited Isaiah to partner with God in renewing the world. Isaiah boldly accepted God’s invitation and went out into the world serving God. Through worship Isaiah perceived the holy glory of God, became self aware, opened himself to God, received forgiving grace, changed and was empowered to serve. A common progression during worship is to oscillate from seeing God, to seeing yourself, to forgiveness, to service.

The Apostle Paul compares worship to getting dressed. Ponder how you clothe yourself for different tasks. Ponder how clothing yourself in different ways affects the way you think and feel. Ponder how clothing communicates. The Apostle Paul says worship is clothing yourself with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, love, peace and thankfulness. Next Paul urges us to be open, to listen, to perceive and to be filled with the rich message about Christ so that whatever we say or do reveals God.

Paul wrote **Colossians 3:12-17** “**Since God chose you to be the holy people God loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful. Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom God gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Jesus to God the Father.**”

Jesus said **John 15:5** “**I am the vine and you are the branches.**” Worship connects the branches to the vine, keeps us connected to the source of life and helps us grow in Jesus. In true worship people find such help, courage, belonging, care, love and renewal that they cannot help but, to bear fruit, to share their worship experience.

True worship is a verb. If worship ever seems flat, boring or devoid of inspiration and nourishment then you need to examine yourself, your attitude and your preparation for worship for worship is your work. If worship ever seems dull then your worship is not about our creative, joyful God who renews you and all of life.

Richard Foster urges us to practice the discipline of worship by opening ourselves to the adventurous life of the Holy Spirit. Worship begins with holy expectancy and ends with holy obedience. If worship does not propel us into greater obedience, it has not been worship. To stand before the Holy One of eternity is to change. In worship ever increasing love enters your heart, compassion grows in the soul and pure thoughts spring from your grace cleansed mind. To worship is to change.

Although worship is unique for each person Richard offers several ways to be that will help most worship. In order to truly worship every moment of your life needs to prepare you for the worship service. Holy expectancy is making worship a priority by listening, ever listening. It is continual observing to hear if God is addressing you through the snow, a smile or a song, to allow God to move through your every

action, your fingers as you type, your voice as you speak. Holy expectancy is filling every moment with inward whispers of adoration, praise and thanksgiving.

Worship is living in a manner that sets yourself before God so God can transform you. Worship is a radical shift from self initiated thoughts, feelings and activities to God initiated thoughts, feelings and activities. Worship is stilling yourself long enough that everything you say, do and feel is prompted by God. This is hard to do so remember worship is a life long practice. Strive to continually grow in rooting every motion of your life in God. The moment you wake up, pray, so you are aware of God, examine yourself and be open to restoration. Repeat this practice throughout the day so more and more of your life is God initiated.

Worship is being full of praise. The language of praise is singing, shouting, dancing, clapping, rejoicing and adoring. Praise is remembering and declaring God's blessings as God delivers you out of darkness into God's marvelous light. Praise is emotions of gratitude, peace, joy and love. Praise is physically bowing your head, lifting hands, standing forming your posture in ways that glorify God.

Your whole week should prepare you for worship. Cultivate your gratitude by making a list of your blessings so you are prepared to thank God. Keep a journal of questions and insights so you are prepared to listen for God's explanations. Prepare by getting a good night sleep, eating a healthy breakfast, exercising, clearing your schedule, letting go and confession so you are at your best to fully participate.

Worship is sacrifice. Many times you will not be prepared for worship, other times you will not feel like worshipping other times you will be so buried under problems, circumstances and pains that you doubt God. In these instances worship starts with sacrifice. Sacrifice is worshipping despite not having the time, preparation, heart, mind, posture, desire or whatever to worship. Sacrifice is continuing to worship even when the last service was dry and you have entered the dark night of the soul. Sacrifice is commitment to regular on going worship trusting that eventually God will renew you.

Worship is offering your best to God and allowing God to renew you. Worship is opening yourself so you can perceive "aha" moments from God that change you and mold you. Worship is connecting with God allowing God's transcendent hand to pull you out of selfishness into love. Worship is actively searching for what God desires to say to you through the music, prayers, scripture, sermon, sacrament and fellowship even the aspects of worship you do not like. Worship deepens your appreciation of God's grace. Through worship you become more aware of God's holiness, your sinfulness and God's grace that pardons, forgives, heals, loves and accepts you. Worship transforms you making you true, holy, peaceful, loving and joyful. Worship is your resurrection. Worship is your extreme makeover. Worship is renewal.

The bulletin insert contains a few suggestions on worship. Strive to grow in your practice of worship. Amen

# **Soul Renewal**

## Spiritual practices for your extreme makeover

### Worship

#### Worship is ...

Worship is a verb to be practiced by every person. Worship is to glorify God with thanksgiving, gratitude and love. Worship is actively seeking, looking and listening for God. Worship is understanding yourself. Worship is opening yourself to receive guidance, forgiveness, transformation, resurrection and renewal from God. Worship is being empowered by God with grace, love, joy, peace and hope enabling you to serve and love.

#### Practice worship by...

##### **Preparation**

- ◆ Be open and expect to have your mind, heart and behavior changed.
- ◆ Cultivate your gratitude by making a list of your blessings, loves and joys so you are prepared to thank God.
- ◆ Keep a journal of questions, insights and God sightings so you are prepared to listen for God's explanations.
- ◆ Get a good night sleep, eat a healthy breakfast, exercise, clear your schedule, let go and confess so you are at your best to fully participate.
- ◆ Pray for Pastor James, Karen, Aaron, Liz, all worship leaders, all who will worship with you and yourself.

##### **Attitude**

- ◆ Enter worship not to observe or evaluate rather to offer your best to God, to be open to God, to receive from God and respond with service as you live your renewed life. What is God saying to you through the words of scripture, even if they are read imperfectly; through the sermon, even if the illustrations are weak; and through the unified power of music, even if you dislike the flat song.
- ◆ Come with spiritual eagerness, passion, awe, holy expectancy and love.

##### **Daily Personal Worship**

- ◆ Community and personal worship are synergistic, they complement and strengthen the experience of each.
- ◆ Daily worship with prayer, Bible and devotional reading and watching for God sightings.

##### **Every Moment Strive to:**

- ◆ listen to God.
- ◆ allow God to move through your actions.
- ◆ inwardly whisper adoration, praise and thanksgiving.
- ◆ have your thoughts, feelings and activities initiated by God.

##### **Worship**

- ◆ Glorify God with thanksgiving, gratitude and love.
- ◆ Praise God with singing, shouting, dancing, clapping, rejoicing, adoring and your posture.
- ◆ Present yourself as a living sacrifice.
- ◆ Let go of burdens, idols and distractions.

- ◆ Invite God into every aspect of your life.
- ◆ Actively seek, look and listen for God.
- ◆ Strive to perceive our holy, glorious God.
- ◆ Examine and understand yourself.
- ◆ Confession your imperfection, your sinfulness.
- ◆ Accept God's forgiveness, cleansing and healing.
- ◆ Open yourself to receive guidance, freedom, transformation, resurrection and renewal from God.
- ◆ Nourish yourself upon God's grace, peace, hope, love and joy.
- ◆ Deepen your relationship with Jesus.
- ◆ Strive to live with greater obedience to God.
- ◆ Welcome God's empowerment and call to lovingly serve.