

## The Way We Worship

### Week 3

As I write this, the big 2024 solar eclipse is one day away...oh, the anticipation. As we continue to consider The Way We Worship, perhaps the relationship between the sun and the moon is a fitting illustration for us to consider. The moon produces no light. Any light we see from the moon is simply the sun's reflection coming off the moon. So it is with humans and God. Anything good coming from humans is actually a reflection of God's goodness. As the sun is the source of heat and light in our solar system, so God is the source of life and goodness in the universe.

Humans are meant to reflect and radiate the glory of God to the rest of existence. But make no mistake, it's HIS glory, not ours.

In the Sermon on the Mount (which we'll be studying this summer), Jesus has this to say, “...*let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*” (Matthew 5:16, emphasis added) One of the ways we worship is by turning attention (ours as well as others') away from us and toward God. A key way that people are meant to know that there is a God and that God loves them is through our worship of God. Again, worship is our love and devotion, loyalty and allegiance to God. One of the main ways we worship, then, is through our “good deeds”...i.e. caring for others, serving others. We demonstrate our love for God by loving others. (And love is not sentiment, it's action.)

The Church is always meant to be the Christ-centered community of people, looking for ways to make Jesus known by loving and serving those around us in His name. We don't do “good works” (in all the various forms, expressions, manifestations that there are) in order to make a name for ourselves, but to lift up the name of Jesus. We love Jesus, and we want others to know and love Jesus too. God loves people, and we want to see love completed/returned as they love God back. This is the role of the Church in the world.

- *It can be tempting, and very subtle, to want to make a name for ourselves (individually or collectively) and to lose sight of the fact that it's God who is to be lifted up and glorified. When have you seen this occur? How can we guard ourselves against that? How do we discern when that shift has happened?*
- *When you think of good works or serving others, do you typically think of that in the category of worship or something else? Explain.*

The apostle Peter said it this way in I Peter 2:9-12...

*“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God...”*  
(This is WHO we are.)

*“...that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.”* (This is WHAT we do.)

*“Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”* (This is WHY we do it.)

*“Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us.”* (This is HOW we do it.)

It is fair to say that followers of Jesus have always been, and will always be, misunderstood. People will disagree with us, be confused by us, question our motives, etc., but through all of that, our love for God and our love for them is to shine forth through the good works we do. The way we bless and benefit those around us is meant to add credibility to the incredible message we proclaim.

- *What are some of the ways you serve others (in the past or presently)?*

There's a saying, *“Mission exists because worship doesn't.”* Meaning, the end goal of our mission is to see people (ourselves and others) worship (give their love, devotion, loyalty, and allegiance to) God. When/where that happens, when/where worship is happening, the mission is accomplished. (The only caveat or qualification I would add is that this is true assuming a full, rich, robust, life-transforming “worship”, not the narrow, compartmentalized understanding of worship that gets peddled too often today.)

The writers/editors of the *Life With God Bible* introduce each book of the Bible with this little snippet, *“The aim of God in history is the creation of an all-inclusive community of loving persons with God Himself at the very center of this community as its prime Sustainer and most glorious Inhabitant. The Bible traces the formation of this community from the creation in the Garden of Eden all the way to the new heaven and new earth.”* The Church is this community, pointing the rest of humanity to its divine purpose and drawing them into this community.

- *Why do we engage in mission/service? What pitfalls do you think we need to avoid as we do so?*
- *What do you think would be helpful in order to keep in mind that service/mission is about worship?*

Unfortunately, we (Christians/the Church) have a tendency to get distracted, to take our eyes off the goal, to turn inward, to allow ourselves to be encumbered by tradition, preferences, obsolete structures/systems, to allow worldly/cultural values and priorities to entangle us and keep us from Becoming all that we were meant to be and fulfilling all that we were designed to do.

While worship is the goal, it is also the solution to this tendency. Worship, in all its various forms/expressions, shapes us into the type of people who reflect God (His love and His character) to the world around us. As demonstrated all throughout the Scriptural story, God has a heart for the hurting, the oppressed, the marginalized, those in need. That being the case, we want to cultivate a similar heart in ourselves (individually and as a community) Acts of worship can (are meant to) lead to a life of worship. One key form of worship is serving others, caring for others. By its very nature, this requires us to think beyond/outside of the walls of our church building and “worship services” to wherever there are people in need.

To say it another way, good, healthy, robust worship not only glorifies God but also contributes to human flourishing. God cares deeply for humans, so our love for God will reflect this same deep care.

- *When you think about “worship”, what context does your mind tend to go towards?*

I recall a pastor friend of mine speaking about the congregation he served saying, “*I want us to be known for the service of our church, not our church service.*” In other words, he hoped that they would be known for their good works in the community around them more than what went on in their building for an hour each week. As I’ve pondered that, I can really only think of one church/denomination/tradition that is probably more known for their charitable deeds over their gatherings...so much so, that most people think of them as a charity instead of a church (though they technically are a church)...and that’s The Salvation Army. (Perhaps there are others...but that’s the only one that readily comes to mind.)

- *What do you think CUMC is known for? What would you hope we are known for? What do you think God wants us to be known for?*

On Sunday April 21, CUMC is hosting a Missions Fair. The idea is that we recognize we have congregants/members of our church family who are connected and involved with various organizations that are serving others in a variety of ways. We want to see/know what our folks are involved in and to learn more about the work being done by these organizations.

Additionally, our hope is that people will be inspired or drawn to some form of good work/service to others if they are not already doing so. To say it another way, we’re hoping to expand our repertoire of worship. Furthermore, we don’t need to reinvent the wheel...if there are organizations doing good stuff out there, we can simply connect/partner with them. If you happen to be one of those people who’s having an organization you serve with represented, how much fun would it be to see others from your church family join you in that work?

When we think of service as worship we can think on a variety of levels. For example, I’ve had the opportunity to go to Mexico with a team of others to build a home for a family about 15 different times over the years. An endeavor like that takes a lot of planning and preparation, time off work, a fair amount of money, etc. At the same time, when it’s all said and done, a family has a home that will give them safety, security, and stability for generations.

On a different level, in the past I've been part of a small group (what we call a Table Group at CUMC) that regularly (monthly) served at an organization called Children's Bureau that provides support for families who need extra support. Our group would basically hang out with kids on a Saturday while their parents (usually single moms) were able to get things done or just have a break...things that those of us with a wider support network tend to take for granted.

I've been a part of another small group that served with an organization called Cultivate Food Rescue. This organization receives/collects good, excess, unused food from stores, restaurants, manufacturers, and distributors and redistributes it to those in need. Our group would monthly pack up food that would be sent home with kids from impoverished families over the weekend so they'd have food to eat when not in school.

- *What organizations are you (or have been) connected to (either through serving with them or supporting them financially)? What has drawn you to those organizations?*
- *In your experience, have you served/volunteered more as an individual or as a group?*
- *What cause, need, issue or people do you have a heart for? What are you doing with that?*

I share all this for a reason. We at CUMC are in a year of transition when it comes to how we participate in missions. One of the key changes we're hoping to make is seeing smaller groups within CUMC (like Table Groups for example) serve together in the community with some sort of regularity. Again, there are so many organizations out there doing really good work. We want to see CUMC folks come alongside them (individually or in smaller groups) and join in the effort. We want to worship God by serving those around us.

- *As a Table Group, how might you serve together? Or, who might you connect with and serve alongside?*

Now let's get down to brass tacks. Conceptually, I suspect, we all agree with this...that serving others in the name of Jesus is good and is a form/expression of worship. But what would we identify as our biggest challenge in actually doing this? In a word, TIME. We don't mind serving others...heck, we might even enjoy it, when it's easy, convenient, and doesn't take too much time. This begs the question, what are we so busy doing? What's taking up all of our time? What is taking priority over worshiping God by serving others?

I suspect that the answer to that question goes back to something we discussed in week 1 of this series. Is our life God-oriented or self-oriented? Our use of time reflects our orientation. Do we worship/serve when it fits into our schedule, or do we schedule our life so that worship/service is a priority?

This actually goes back to our first series of this year, *Sacred Rhythms*, appropriately subtitled, *Arranging Our Lives For Spiritual Transformation*. Throughout that series we discussed

various practices that can help us form a Rule of Life. Or to say it another way, we explored various acts/forms of worship that help contribute to and shape a Life of Worship.

In closing, let's remember that worship is about love...love returned. God loves us, and we return that love by loving those around us (which looks like service/mission, care and compassion). As John says in I John 4:19, "*We love because He first loved us.*", and earlier in that same letter he says, "*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for one another. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in them?*" (I John 3:16-17) And Jesus makes it clear in Matthew 25:31-46 that what we do (or don't do) for the hungry, thirsty, the stranger, the needy, the sick or imprisoned, we do (or don't do) unto Him. When we love Jesus, we worship Him, in and through our love and care for others.

### Soul Training Exercise ~ Lectio Divina ~ Romans 12:1-16

## Lectio Divina

*Latin for Divine Reading. The desire is to encounter and surrender to the Living God by attending to Scripture. Lectio requires a humble, listening posture that is alert to the voice of God in Scripture.*

### Lectio

First read the text (lectio). You give it a slow, focused and naive reading of the passage.

### Meditatio

Then re-read the same passage paying attention to what word or phrase stands out.

### Oratio

Third, offer a simple prayer in response to God.

### Contemplatio

After prayer, the text is read for the third time with the focus on listening for the Voice of God (contemplatio). This is a gift of grace and cannot be forced. Here is where you are hoping to interact with God, listening for His voice. You can ask the question, "*Lord, what do you want to do inside me?*"

### Actio

Finally consider your response to God's Word and grace (actio). How can you make your life a gift to others in response to the Word?