

Micah 6:6–8 (NIV)

⁶With what shall I come before the LORD
and bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
⁷Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
⁸He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.

Luke 18:9–15 (NIV)

⁹To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

¹³“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

¹⁴“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

*With what attitude do we come to worship? What is on our minds and in our hearts?
How much do joy and celebration characterize our worship?.*

Jesus once told a parable about two men who walked into the great temple in Jerusalem to pray.

One is a Pharisee. Educated and much respected by all. He attended to all his prayers and fasted twice a week. He tithed scrupulously. Indeed, the man was diligent in all such matters. And he made sure that everyone knew it. As he now makes sure God knows it. In the eyes of the world, this Pharisee is upright and righteous, the sort of man embraced by the LORD God Almighty. He is most dignified.

The second man is a far different sort. A tax collector, despised by all and hated by many. Like Zacchaeus (Luke 19) he is probably a rich man given his trade. But he won't even look up while he prays and all he will say about himself is that he is a sinner, in need of God's mercy. That's it.

One upright and dignified man. One tax collector – about as far from dignified as you can get. Dignity, you see, in the ancient world, and still to some extent in ours, was a socially-defined term. It was about how you appeared before others and there was little in life that mattered more. Even wealth was gained principally so that one could gain honor and reputation . . . dignity. Livy (59BC to 17AD), one of the greatest historians of ancient Rome, wrote: “Dignity is a matter which concerns only mankind.” For dignity was the quality of being worthy or honorable in the eyes of others – not the gods.

In the eyes of others and himself, the Pharisee is about as dignified as you can get. He even feels compelled to point out to God that he is far more righteous than lesser men, those robbers, adulterers, and assorted doers of evil. The Pharisee had always taken great pains to ensure that everyone knew he was a righteous.

Sadly, the Pharisee has it all wrong. He is so concerned that everyone see and applaud his supposed righteousness that he fails to grasp the condition of his heart. If he ever did know, he no longer remembers that God's great commandments are to love God and others.

The scene of these two men in the temple is like that of a Jewish law court. The two men come into the room and the judge (God, in this case) declares one man in the right (justified) and one man in the wrong (unjustified). Who is declared by God to be in the right? The despised tax collector who admitted he was a sinner and begged for mercy. God saw in him a humble heart; not so with the Pharisee.

700 years before Jesus, the prophet Micah addressed this very issue. Does God really want fancy sacrifices, carefully constructed rituals, rivers of oil in offering? No – what God wants is that we act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with him. Thus, Jesus pronounces this despised tax collector to be humble, exalted and righteous in the eyes of God.

Let's bring this around to talking about worship.

I suppose that we all want to be thought well of by others – but thought well of for what? Have you ever found yourself more absorbed with how people are dressed during worship than you are the service itself? Have you ever thought to yourself that some folks were too shabbily or too casually dressed to attend the worship service.

A few weeks one of our 9:30 regulars locked himself out of his own house on Saturday evening and spent the night in a motel, in the clothes he was wearing at the time. On Sunday morning, he came to the 9:30 service right from the motel – still wearing his old t-shirt and shorts. That morning, I couldn't help but wonder how many people looked at him and thought – how inappropriate a way to dress for church. But the truth is that he surely brought a smile to Jesus' face that morning. He did mine. It was the right thing to do. It is always the right thing to worship God – any time, any place . . . any dress.

I grew up hearing people talking about putting on their "Sunday best." That is well and good so far as it goes, but we have to remind ourselves that God cares about our hearts not our clothing. A humble heart isn't something you wear.

How unrestrained are we in worship? Do we ever fail to sing because we are worried about what those sitting near us will say? Do we ever dance? Do we ever express any joy in such a way someone would know it? Or do we mainly just sit there – quiet, stoic, and very dignified.

Sometime watch the fans at a Rangers game when the team is winning. How much celebration do you see? How much enthusiasm? How much participation? How much joy? How many smiles? Is anyone worried about their dignity as John Hamilton sends another one flying out of the park?

Why is that we experience very little of that in our worship, or only on "special" occasions or the "big" Sundays? How do we stop worrying so much about what other people say or think and simply come to God with a humble and joyful heart?

Perhaps a good start would be to remind ourselves again what worship is really about.

Worship

Worship is hardwired into us. Our deepest self feels this urge, this need to worship. Thus, the question isn't really whether we worship, but only what or whom we worship. Will we worship our ancestors or nature or our jobs or a sports hero or wealth or sex . . . you get my point. N. T. Wright rightly takes this a step further when he says that we become what we worship. Worship money and we become greedy. Worship sex and we become lustful. . . . But worship the LORD God, our creator and redeemer, and we become Christlike. That is simply how it works.

It is easy for us to think of worship as something we all gather for once each week. We pray, sing hymns, hear a sermon, and so on. Then we return a week later for another worship service and do it all again. But this is not the biblical understanding of worship. Our growth as the covenant people of God will not come through a one-hour shot in the arm each week! Instead, as Richard Foster says so well, "To worship is to experience Reality, to touch Life. It is to know, to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community. It is . . . being invaded by the Shekinah¹ of God."² God actively seeks worshipers. God wants a relationship with us and our acknowledgement of his glory and worth. Worship is a vital means by which we grow as God's people and enrich our lives with each other as well as with God.

And it could never be a matter of how we dress or our worship "style."

Bringing back together the who and the where

We are made for the worship of the LORD God, revealed in Jesus Christ. And, as Simon Chan writes, "God made the world in order to make the church." The church does not consist of buildings, not even the beautiful sanctuaries such as our own. Rather, the church consists of all those who have faith in Jesus Christ. When we rise each week to recite the Apostles Creed and affirm our belief in "one holy catholic church," we mean the universal church, the body of Christ – to which all Christians, all those who have faith in Jesus Christ, belong. God had once dwelt in the temple of Jerusalem, but, beginning at Pentecost, God dwells in and among his people. It is the people of God themselves who are joined together in Christ, a new creation and new humanity, growing into a holy temple, the temple to which God has returned. What a remarkable claim we make, that God's very presence dwells in us, the church -- the people of God.

For more than twenty-five years, there has been a congregation called St. Andrew in the holy, catholic church. We have been on a journey, understanding that God created us to be his. We are a large community and we have all the blessings and challenges that come with size, but we must never lose sight of the fact that we are not merely an organization. Rather, we, as the body of Christ, are the very presence of Christ.

We are a growing and dynamic community of faith, marked by a welcoming warmth that we cherish and nurture and by a commitment to communal worship, in its many and varied forms. This has been made possible by a committed and generous congregation that has always understood there is joy in giving. The larger church and our small part of it is the place of hope and joy we all seek, because we know whom we are to worship.

¹ *Shekinah* is an Old Testament term meaning the glory of God dwelling with his people. It connotes God's living presence with us, as opposed to his aloofness, distance, or transcendence.

² From Richard Foster's, *The Celebration of Discipline*, 1978, New York: HarperCollins. This is a widely read and loved book on the spiritual disciplines. The quote opens his chapter on worship, p. 158.

Worship as Service

Typically, the Biblical authors use the Greek word *proskyneō* to connote worship and it is used only in relation to God. The wise men bow in worship, the disciples worship Jesus. When Cornelius tried to worship (*proskyneō*) Peter, Peter stopped him, reminding Cornelius that worship is reserved for God (Acts 10:25-26).

Jesus reminds us that the worshiping of God is bound up with serving God. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, the devil showed him the whole earth promising “All these I will give you, if you fall down and worship me.” Jesus replied by quoting from the Hebrew scriptures (Deut 6:1), “Worship (*proskyneō*) the Lord your God, and serve (*latreōu*) only him.” (see Matthew 4:1-11) In the New Testament, *latreōu* is most often translated “serve,” but is translated “worship” more than a dozen times!¹ Why? Because serving God is worshipping God! In the NT, *latreōu* always denotes service rendered to God, whether it is in a ministry of prayer (e.g., Acts 26:7), missionary work (2 Cor 8:18), or simply the service to God rendered by leading a righteous life (see Phil 3:3).² This is why you’ll sometimes hear Christians say things like “Our mission trip was an act of worship.” They are right. We acknowledge God’s glory and worth when we serve him. Worship includes our prayers and praise songs, but it so much more!³

¹ For example, Luke 2:37, Acts 7:7, Acts 24:14, Philippians 3:3, and Rev 7:15

² From Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (abridged by G. Bromily)

³ One last observation. In the first centuries after Jesus, Christians stopped using the word *proskyneō* for worship because it was also used by pagans in reference to the worship of their gods. Instead, when referring to their own worshiping of the one true God, Christians used only the Greek word for serving, *latreōu*!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

The following discussion questions were written for the Connection Groups that are meeting during this series:

Joy is a wonderful thing. An historic Christian statement of our purpose is that we are to know God and enjoy him forever. Yet, too often, joy escapes us when we come to worship. Sometimes, we attend out of a sense of obligation – hardly the beginning of joy. People get wild and crazy at baseball games. How many of us get similarly enthusiastic about worship? And if we do, would anyone know? Or do we restrain ourselves, so we don’t look “undignified.”

1. An article in a Christian magazine had a provocative title: “Worshiping the Lamb or Entertaining the Sheep?” Do you think we tend to come to church expecting to be entertained? What do you think is most important in a worship service? What would you like to see changed about our services at St. Andrew? What do you think God would like to see changed? What can we do to help ensure that our focus is on the true worship of God?
2. Have you ever attended a worship service that seemed undignified? What was your reaction? What do you think genuinely undignified Christian worship would look like?
3. You might reflect on exactly whom it is we worship. If we become what or whom we worship, how do we know that we are truly worshipping the true God? What in our lives competes for our worship? (The Texas Rangers?) Why is it so important that we worship together?
4. With the Well having started up, we are going to get lots of first-time visitors at St. Andrew. What do you think they expect from our worship services? What might we do to help them want to return? How can we go about becoming better “inviters”?

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Monday, Galatians 3:27-31 We worship together, all together, as one body.</p>	<p>Tuesday, Ephesians 1:3-21 This passage is rooted in Jewish worship and tells the story of what God has done in creation.</p>
<p>Wednesday, Romans 12:1-2 How should this passage inform our understanding of worship?</p>	<p>Thursday, Romans 15:7-13 The Christ whom we worship is the hope of all the nations.</p>
<p>Friday, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 All creation worships not only God, but also the Lamb.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Weekly Joys and Concerns</p>

