Hi,

Happy Friday. Today’s updates:

* This Sunday in my 11am class we will be continuing the series, *Living Hope*, for I know we could all use some more hope in these very difficult times. We’ll be talking about the nature of the Christian hope and how we can live that hope every day, how such hope can change how we see ourselves and how we understand the world around us. I hope you will join us [on my Facebook page for ministry](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour).
* My 3pm Monday class on Matthew and my noon Tuesday class on Genesis will meet next week, both on [my new Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour).
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.
* The Weekly Bible Study is attached.

Yesterday, we talked about church. Today, we remind ourselves of the importance of worshipping as a people. The importance is not diminished merely because we must meet on-line.

***John 4:19-26(NRSV)***

**The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”**

In today’s passage from John 4, Jesus talks about worship with a Samaritan woman he meets at noon at her village’s well. Though no one outside the village would know why the woman is there at noon, an unusual time, Jesus knows and we too soon learn the truth. She has had five husbands and is currently living with a man to whom she is not even married. She comes to the well at noon to avoid the smirks and snickers of the other women in the village. She lives a lonely life, socially cut-off in a world driven by family and community.

She quickly gets over her astonishment that Jesus knows the truth and, not surprisingly, tries to change the subject. Isn’t that so like us all. When we get close to the heart of a difficult matter, when we begin talking about something that makes us uncomfortable, we try to shift the conversation elsewhere.

So the woman changes the subject to a talk about worship, especially the “where” of worship. I guess that shouldn’t surprise us either. We can get pretty caught up in the importance of this spot of land or that one, in one building or another. Certainly, Jesus’ fellow Jews were often so focused on the importance of “The Land,” that they failed to see God’s work in all the world. Jesus tries to help her see that worship is not really about the “where” but the “who.” What matters is not where the woman worships, on the mountain or in Jerusalem, but that she worships the true God. And as we learn in John’s gospel, God is revealed fully only in Jesus Christ.

*What or whom?*

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 Shekinah of God.” As the above passage from the Gospel of John shows and as evidenced in Psalm 100, 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.

*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.” As we saw last week, 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 thirty 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 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.

Finally, the sad fact that we have not been able to meet in the sanctuary for the past several months, does not change any of this. We are the Church, Christ’s body, and if we must meet on-line for a time, then we will. And, one day, hopefully soon, we will be back together in person. What a glorious day that will be.

‘til Monday, grace and peace,

Scott