

St. Andrew's Cathedral
Jackson, Mississippi
Sermon for April 22, 2018 ~ Easter 4B
The Very Reverend Ronald D. Pogue

Your clergy have been in conversations regarding our summer schedule for worship and Christian formation. We've talked a lot about worship attendance patterns at St. Andrew's Cathedral over the last few years. All of this conversation has prompted me to reflect on why I worship God. I came up with ten top reasons why I worship God and I thought it might be helpful to share those with you this morning.

Of course, these ten reasons presuppose that I have at least ten reasons for believing in God to begin with. And, there are certainly plenty of other very good reasons to worship God in addition to these. Some of my reasons are the teachings of the Church that have been handed down for centuries. Others are just MY reasons. In both cases, I have experiential data that confirms the validity of each of these reasons in my life and in the lives of the worshipping communities I have served.

Take a pen or pencil and a piece of paper and jot them down as we go along. See if one or more of them resonates with you and your experience of God. If so, perhaps this one reason can be the start of a new adventure with the God who made you, who loves you, and who desires more than anything else to enjoy a close walk with you.

1. The God I believe in wants to be worshipped.

Martin Luther said, "Whatever your heart clings to and relies upon, that is your god." The God of the Bible, the God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachael, the God and Father of Jesus Christ, takes delight in our worship! Our God wants to be the One our hearts cling to and rely upon.

The story of the Bible is the story of God's call to people to worship and service of Divinity. In Exodus, each time God has Moses go to Pharaoh, God says, "Let my people go, *so that they may worship me*" (Ex. 9:1) Two of the Ten Commandments have to do with worshipping God alone and one has to do with observing the Sabbath (Ex. 20).

The prophets warned of the dire consequences of forsaking the worship of God.

Satan tempted Jesus to worship him. Jesus response was, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only'" (Dt. 6:13).

Jesus told the Samaritan woman: "...a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks" (Jn. 4:23)

The psalms call us to praise. "Come, let us sing unto the Lord." (Ps. 95) "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Ps. 96) "Ascribe to the Lord the honor due his name" (Ps. 29).

Through our worship, we are to give glory to God. Our God is the God of glory!

So, it is God's desire and expectation that those who love God gather to worship God. Consider this: Your employer is not as important to you as God. But what would happen if you refused to give your employer what was asked for? We are called by God to worship God and God alone. The Sovereign of the Universe wants to be worshiped. When we worship God, it is a fulfillment of our vocation, our calling, to put God first in our lives. When we worship God, we minister to God! It matters to God.

2. In corporate worship, I am immersed in and confronted by the story of faith.

In worship, I hear the story read, talked about, sung about, prayed about, acted out in the Font and upon the Altar. I use my senses to see myself in the story and I see that the story is MY story. Sometimes it confirms my actions, sometimes it condemns them, sometimes it provides a way, sometimes it bars the way. This story holds me accountable.

Why is this important? Because unless I have an awareness of my own need, my own frailty, my own imperfection, as well as my potential as a child of God, it is not likely that I will value the grace God offers me. This story is a saving story. Practically every important decision of my life and every high moment of inspiration have occurred in worship.

3. The rituals and symbols we share in worship express that which goes beyond words.

God incorporated outward signs and symbols in the design for the Tabernacle in the wilderness, for the covenant box in which the tablets of the law were kept, for the vestments of God's priests, and for the Temple in Jerusalem. Jesus from infancy participated in this worship...it was his custom.

"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28).

I recall the story of preacher who had a violinist play one Sunday. The leaders of his congregation called a meeting with him to complain. In that meeting, one man said, "The violin is the devil's instrument." To which the preacher replied, "Well, it's time God got a little enjoyment out of it for a change."

4. Worship is the beginning of my response to the immeasurable love of God.

I remember a church where I sometimes worshipped as a youth. On either side of the chancel, there were panels, somewhat like our hymn boards. Instead of numbers, one said Enter to Worship, and the other said Depart to Serve. Our service of God flows from our worship of God. In worship we are nourished in Word and Sacrament in order to be sent out to be a Sacrament for a hungry, hurting world.

There is work to do in God's service. Doing good outside the context of worship is as dangerous a thing as letting worship stop at the door. Work and worship must go hand in hand. We are both a priestly people and a prophetic people.

Jesus certainly spent plenty of time in the synagogue. We have no record of his ever having complained that his parents made him go as a child and therefore he feels justified in not going as an adult. Jesus spent plenty of time worshiping both in private and in company with his disciples and in the great congregation at the synagogue and temple. In the rhythm of his life, work and worship were perfectly balanced.

5. When I have drifted away from God, worship is the means by which I am drawn back.

“My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?” (Ps. 42:2)

God has promised to meet me in the company of God’s people. Usually, when I feel far off from God, it is due to my own wandering and lack of awareness of the divine presence everywhere I am. So, God calls me to a holy place, a place set apart, and in that place I wait for him. I hear God’s voice and feel God’s touch again so that when I go back out into the world, which is not yet whole or holy, I can hear God’s voice above the rest and feel God’s tugging at my heart more than any other influence.

6. I promised I would.

We are called to live in a covenant relationship with God and one another. Look at the vows we took. The promise to “... continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers” means and has always meant, “I’ll show up for worship.”

God has made a covenant with us. God holds himself to his promises. All God asks is for us to hold ourselves to our part of the covenant. I have a duty. Duty is not a bad word, although researchers tell us that my generation thinks it is. God has sworn to have a duty toward us. Our response is to do our duty toward God. Although we have given God many occasions to feel like forgetting God’s duty toward us, God never has. So our duty to God is to be maintained regardless of how we feel. Love divine is a decision, not just a feeling. There is value in learning and teaching our children to do things because they are inherently good for us and because we promised we would do these things. “There is no life without community. There is no community without commitment” (George Rupp). If we lower our expectations concerning commitment, we kiss community and, perhaps life, goodbye.

7. Through worship, my time, life, and space is sanctified and made holy.

God's priority is to redeem creation and have it set apart entirely for his glory. I believe in this God! Then it logically follows that I must do my part to let God make the tiny corner of the universe I inhabit and the brief span of time I am here, holy. I start the week with worship. It sets the priorities back in God's order.

8. In worship, my perspective is refocused.

God wants me to look at this world and the people God has created as God sees them. In worship, I am given a new set of lenses through which I begin to look at things through God's eyes. Only when

I begin to see things God's way can I begin to understand what God wants me to do and why.

9. When I worship with other believers, there is mutual encouragement.

In the Letter to the Hebrews, we read these powerful words of exhortation: “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another...” (Hebrews 10:24ff). Look around you this morning. Is someone missing? Who is going to call them to let them know? Who is going to encourage them if they are sick, or sad, or struggling? That you notice whenever someone doesn't show up may be the prompting of the Holy Spirit to reach out to that person and spur them on.

10. In worship, I make a public witness concerning who and whose I am.

Christianity is a public religion. To make it anything else is to destroy it. Public worship and public confession of faith are inescapable elements of what we mean when we talk about being a Christian. Though I may enjoy my relationship with God in a very private, interior way and I should, my belief in God is incomplete unless it has an outward and visible sign. Worship is the first of those outward and visible signs.

There was an elderly man who was blind and nearly deaf who never missed a Sunday service. Someone asked him why he came to worship since he couldn't see or hear what was going on. He replied, “I come to make sure everybody knows whose side I'm on.”

The Shepherd and Guardian of our souls *is* on our side. Our worship is the primary way we demonstrate that we are on his side. He who provides for all our needs, who makes us lie down in green pastures, who leads us beside still waters, who knows our names, who walks with us through the dark and scary places of life, is worthy of our worship. He is passionate about us and the only worthy response to his infinite love is passionate worship.

These are the ten top reasons why I worship God. What does your list look like? Whatever your reasons, I pray that you will be passionate about worship and let your love of God be joined with other passionate worshippers in this place – sing with a little more gusto, pray with a little more fervor, and watch, look, and listen for the new thing God is doing in your life.

11. When I worship with other believers, there is mutual encouragement.

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