

Scripture Reading:

Ephesians 2: “1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. 11 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh--who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—12 that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. 17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. 18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. 19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

"Called Into the Presence of God"

We begin this morning a series of five sermons on how and why we worship here at Church of the King.

- It will be a back-to-the-basics series and it is appropriate to ask why we need it at this time.

I am not concerned that we are slipping away from where we should be: On the contrary I am pleased to see us growing more vigorous in our singing and we continue to try and be more Biblical in our worship as we have this morning. However, I think there are two very good reasons for some review:

- First it is good for us to remember why we do what we do here on Sunday mornings
- Second, we have a tremendous responsibility to pass on our love of the Lord's Day and a right understanding of proper worship to the covenant children that God has blessed us with!

As Jeff Meyers rightly says in his book *The Lord's Service*,

- “The way we now worship, the way we pray, the way we approach God in corporate worship in our churches will determine what our spiritual grandchildren one day will believe, teach and confess.”

We will cover in each message the major elements of what we call Covenant Renewal Worship:

- **A Call to Worship our Triune God**
- **A Confession of our sins**
- **A time of Consecration of the Saints**
- **A Communion meal with our Savior**
- **A Commission to disciple the nations**

It will be important to remember that in each of these elements God is the one who acts and we respond:

- **God calls us and we respond by gathering together**
- **God demands that we be Holy and we respond by confessing our sins and receiving forgiveness**
- **God instructs us from His Word & we listen & bring our gifts and prayers**
- **God sets before us His Holy meal and we respond with the eating of the bread and drinking of the wine in faith**
- **God commands us to go forth and take His Kingdom to all the earth and we respond by going forth to live faithful and obedient lives during the week.**

We do not gather for worship to be spectators and we do not gather to simply give something to God

- **God calls us together to renew His Covenant with us!**

The Call to Worship may seem like the simplest of these elements and yet it is one of the most profound... And, I would argue, one of the least understood of all of them in the modern Church here in America. What we understand about the call to worship and how we respond will reveal our priorities when it comes to the right worship of our Triune God.

So we begin with the very simple, but important question:

- **Why do we come to Church on Sunday?**
- ⇒ **Is it because we have always done so?**
- ⇒ **Is it because there was nothing else to distract us this week?**
- ⇒ **Is it because our parents made us come?**
- ⇒ **Is it because of the great food?**
- ⇒ **Is it because it is where I see some of my friends?**

There may be some truth in all of these possibilities but they are wrong priorities:

- **We gather on Sunday morning because God calls us together!**

If we REALLY believe that: It changes how we approach the worship service on Sunday!

- **So how can I be so sure that God wanted us here at eleven o'clock this morning?**

First we know from our study of the New Testament that the Saints gathered on the first day of the week

- **The day of Christ's resurrection!**

We will talk a lot about how the Bible informs us about right worship in these five weeks, but we need to always remember that:

- The Old Testament or old Covenant worship always looked forward to the work of Jesus
- The New Testament or New Covenant worship is always celebrating the finished work of Jesus and applying it to our lives.

It should NOT surprise us to find similarities in how the Saints worshiped nor should we be afraid to allow those Old Testament patterns to teach us about what we are doing during New Testament worship. As we saw in the reading from Ephesians chapter two this morning, we are now in Christ, not only as individuals but as His body, as a Holy Nation which we learned from Peter last week.

This is also the point made by Paul in the letter to the Hebrews: *[we are going to discuss a lot from Hebrews in the coming weeks and rather than say 'the writer of' I am going to assume the authorship of Paul]* As Paul begins to review the importance of Lord's Day worship he says this in chapter four:

Hebrews 4:14: "14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Paul then outlines how Jesus is our great high priest who in fact did accomplish all that was foreshadowed in the Old Testament tabernacle and temple worship and then comes back to this same point:

Hebrews 10:19 "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

Do we as individual have access to the throne of grace because of what Jesus did?

- Yes, but this is NOT the focus of what Paul is teaching here.

We are called the Body of Christ, each being members. We are called a nation of priests, each being a priest in our own right.

- BUT when God calls us together on the Lord's Day He is not calling us to gather as a bunch individuals, but as His Body, as His Nation.
- And yes, how we respond is important.

Many of us are excited right now about the Giants going to the World Series.

Well the members of the team are going to be called together for the first game at a specific time and place. If one team has members who wonder in late, come wearing their sweats or don't bother to come at all, that would not be a good sign. We would expect the coach to be all over the erring players.

However, if an Elder or Pastor says anything about Church attendance, in many quarters today, he's likely to be told to mind his own business!

The Bible would also encourage us to think of this in the military context:

- If a general calls the troops together for a very important battle and some of them don't show up, some show up late and others forget about half their gear, this would not be a good sign.
- If on the other hand they are there early and excited, well equipped and focused, then it would instill fear in their enemies.

So I hope you can begin to see the importance of showing up on the Lord's Day, but that still leaves the question about why at eleven o'clock. God has placed pastors and elders over His churches and they are the ones who prayerfully consider when the congregation is to be gathered.

- Some call them together morning and evening to stress that Sunday is the Lord's Day.
- Some call the meeting in the afternoon because that is when they can get a facility
- Some have multiple services to make room for everyone to attend.

Here at Church of the King, we gather at the traditional American time of eleven and follow our service with a fellowship meal giving us an extended time together as the Body of Christ.

- So does making sure you are here by eleven fulfill your requirement as a faithful Saint? Not really!
- IF we really believe that God is calling us together, we would not only want to make sure we are on time, but also prepared mentally and physically to meet our God.

If you choose to stay up until two or three in the morning on Saturday night you run the risk of oversleeping and will certainly be very tired in any case for worship

If you set the alarm for ten o'clock and live twenty minutes from Church, you are again running the risk of being late and frazzled when you get here.

Although our worship begins at eleven we have a short time of reviewing the songs that will be sung that day and learning some new ones at ten-thirty.

- If you miss that on a regular basis, are you going to be as prepared as you could be to worship the King?

If we don't use that time to help our children learn more about how to sing in church, are we taking their discipleship as seriously as we should?

[just because you struggle to sing does not mean your children will as well!]

- Again, being on time, even making it for the music practice, is still not all that is involved.

Are we as ready as we can be to worship God rightly: Have we put some thought into what we are wearing or just thrown on whatever is clean?

- Did we get the rest we needed the night before?
- Did we eat some breakfast so we are not fading right about now?
- Did we think through our schedules for Saturday night and Sunday mornings so everyone is not a basket case by the time we get to church? *[tell the story of Sunday breakfast]*

Now much of this may seem like silly legalistic details...

But they are NOT if we again focus on the important question:

- Do we really believe that God is calling us together to worship on the Lord's Day?

So we are all here and ready:

- **Now what happens during the call to worship.**

As a final part of all those preparations we have the pianist begin to play music about five minutes before the service. That is when conversations should stop, seats should be taken and perhaps a moment of prayer would be in order. Then we see the first of God's actions and our reactions:

- **It is God who calls us into His presence: We are not asking Him to come join us!**

As we often read from Psalm 95, "Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving!"

We immediately respond by singing a hymn of adoration just as we often see the angels and Saints do when they are gathered around the throne of God in heaven. We have used O Worship the King as our song of adoration and we do so each week so that our youngest children can begin to participate, even before they can read...

- **They have better memories than we do, but we need to encourage them to participate.**

Theron or Mike then declare the salutation: "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" and we respond with a hearty AMEN.

We are then reminded that we are now truly in the presence of our Triune God when the leader says, "Jehovah be with you and we respond with "and also with you."

- **We are constantly reminded that we are now in the presence of God and that we are participants not just spectators!**
- **We are not in the presence of just any god, but the Triune God of the Scriptures!**

We have addressed God by His name: Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

We do not address God as Father because He is a fatherly figure or as a way to help us relate to Him:

- **His name is Father because God the Father has been God the Father from all eternity and all that we know of fathers here earth is derived from His character and His attributes!**

It is the same when we proclaim the name of Son:

- **Jesus is the eternal Son of God not a born or created son. Again all that we know of family relationships is a mere reflection of the great relationship of the Father and Son.**

And it is the Spirit of God who has delighted in that relationship and served that relationship for all of eternity.

God is not like Allah, the monastic God who needed to create something to relate too, or the eastern gods who strive toward Nirvana or nothingness.

- **When the Bible declares that God is love, it is declaring the fact that the three Persons of the Godhead have related to & loved one another from all eternity.**

All that we know of earthly love and relationships is derived from this true nature of God... This is why the punishment of sexual sins is so severe in the Scriptures: They are an offense against the very nature of God.

So we have been called into the presence of the God of the Scriptures and we shall see over the next three weeks how He will renew His covenant with His chosen people.

We have been commanded to come boldly into the presence of God and again we will learn why this is possible and the richness of our relationship to God.

God will remind us that our sins are forgiven, He will instruct us from His Word and accept our gifts and prayers and then we will fellowship with Him around this Table.

- **This is why we gather on the Lord's Day & it should be a central focus of our Christian lives.**

This is something that our children must learn not just intellectually, but practically in their lives. We have the obligation to teach it to them not just intellectually, but practically by giving them the proper example to follow. Our gathering together in response to God's call each week demonstrates that great truth that we read this morning in Ephesians chapter two:

4 "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

Our new song of ascension and responses that we used for the first time this week are intended to help us demonstrate this reality each week: The words are a paraphrase of Psalm 134 set to some of Amber's beautiful music and I pray it will grow to be a very special time for all of us in the service. It reminds us that we are to come boldly before the throne of grace:

"Come bless the Father, all you servants of the Son, who stand by the Spirit in the House of the Lord..."

We are responding to God's call and now as those IN Christ, in the power of the Spirit we can stand before God blessing His holy name, with our hands uplifted: "Lift up your hands to the Holy place and bless your God!" Only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies and then only once a year with blood to represent the great sacrifice Jesus would make.

- Now we can stand as a nation of priests bringing blessings to our God before His Holy face!

And as we gather for God to renew His covenant He graciously responds and thus the Psalmist declares: "May the Lord bless you from Zion, He who made heaven and earth!"

- Our hands shift to receive blessings from God and our minds try to grasp the wonder of Him who made heaven and earth.

This creator is the God who we serve and He loves to bless His people! My prayer and hope is that we all continue to mature in our understanding of just how exciting it is to be called into the presence of Him who made heaven and earth! May we always come ready and properly prepared to stand before the God who has shown us such great mercy...

- Learning to understand the richness of what the Apostle Paul taught the young Ephesian church:

Ephesians 2:19 "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."

Communion Meditation: Psalm 78:1-8

"Give ear, O my people, to my law; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. 2 I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, 3 Which we have heard and known, And our fathers have told us. 4 We will not hide them from their children, Telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done. 5 For He established a testimony in Jacob, And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers, That they should make them known to their children; 6 That the generation to come might know them, The children who would be born, That they may arise and declare them to their children, 7 That they may set their hope in God, And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments; 8 And may not be like their fathers, A stubborn and rebellious generation, A generation that did not set its heart aright, And whose spirit was not faithful to God.