

Remembering our Purpose: Serving Others. Hebrews 13:12-13:17

Adapted from "Finding our Purpose" first delivered at BPC in November, 2013.

George Barna is a nationally known pollster who surveys both Christians and non-Christians about religious issues. In his recent research on styles of "Christian worship," Barna uncovered some disturbing statistics.

- Among regular church going adults, one third said that they had never experienced God's presence in the worship service.
- And one half of all regular church members declared that they had not experienced God in a worship service in the past year.

Seeing these results, a number of thoughts came to mind.

1. First, I thought that the church has certainly dropped the ball when it comes to leading people into worship, if between 1/3 to 1/2 of its members have not regularly – if ever - experienced the presence of God during worship.
2. But having also sat through many a (dare I say) dead worship event, I got to wondering if there was something else blocking so many professed Christians from regularly feeling the presence of God in their worship?

With that question in mind, today let us take a closer look the connection between our acts of Christian service and the worship we give to God.

This is now the fourth Sunday that we have been reviewing Bedford Presbyterian's Purpose statement with the intent of burying it in deeply into our daily living. Let's say it again together now:

*Bedford Presbyterian Church is a Biblically guided Christian community
Loving God, loving others, serving the world, and growing disciples.*

Two weeks ago, we noted that Jesus' command for us to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength is actually the basic definition of what we do as **WORSHIP**.

- Worship then is our loving response back to God with our whole being
- And **worship is active**. it is not in merely sitting through some organized program – like a Sunday Service – **it is how we daily show our to God by what we do!**
- The Apostle Paul went as far to declare that such active worship, this giving of ourselves back to God as a living sacrifice is our **only** reasonable response to the love that God had first shown us (Romans 12:1-2).

So getting up and getting to Church on a Sunday morning is a very small part – if any - of the love and worship, we give to God.

Then last week we added to “loving God” the second part of Jesus’ command that we must also love each other as much as God loves them.

And again, our LOVE for others is primarily shown through our actions. Yes, while feelings are a part of love, **nevertheless, the actual proof of our love is in what we do for others.**

The Apostle John even went as far as to doubt our claim to love God if we are unwilling to share our love with God’s children (1 John 3:17-18). And in his remarks over the communion table, Jesus declared that this active love, this **MINISTRY** that we give to our brothers and sisters is how we will prove to the world that we are actually Christ’s disciples (John 13:34-35). As we often sing: *they will know we are Christians by our love.*

Now, these two thoughts may start to run together, so let’s just summarize them both the same way Jesus did: Proof of our love for God, our “reasonable service of **WORSHIP**”, is demonstrated in how we live out that love by **MINISTERING** to his children; with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Which brings us now to the fourth part of Bedford’s purpose statement: Christ’s call for us to be **servicing the world** – which in a single word is our: **MISSION**.

I bet you won’t be too surprised to learn that just like “WORSHIP” and “MINISTRY,” “MISSION” is also based more on “what we do.” While writing checks to support other’s mission efforts is certainly a vital part, **“MISSION” is even more about us personally going with Jesus outside the city to seek, to serve, to share God’s love with his lost children.**

Like doing ministry, doing mission is how we worship God.

Joining Jesus outside the city... that phrase has haunted my thinking of late. And I think it has two distinct meanings

1. Going to Jesus “outside the city” means leaving our comfort zone, our position of privilege to demonstrate our love for God by serving those who live outside our city: **Mission always requires our going** was this not Jesus’s order to us as his followers: *GO disciple the people !*
2. But “*outside the city*” also means realizing that as a disciple of Christ the world will always consider us “outsiders” (just like they did Jesus) for as another song phrases it: *this world is not our home, we are just passing through.* AS today’s

text poetically noted: *here we have no lasting city*. But we are not just randomly strolling outside the city taking in the sights, we have been sent out there on a mission from God.

So our mission in service of others, those who are on the outside, just like our ministry of love to Christians, those inside Gods' family, are both ways that we actively worship God.

With that summary in mind then, let us look at the Apostle Paul's "Christian to do list" wrote out at the end of his letter to the Hebrew Christians (chapter 13). Such a list is what our Thursday night Bible study calls "something to take home." What practical thing can we do tomorrow to show our love and give God the worship that is his due. Let's walk down his list:

Hebrews Chapter 13: Check list for Christian living:

1. showing continuous mutual Love for other Christians
2. offering hospitality to all others
3. Remembering those imprisoned & tortured for their faith
4. Honoring your marriage
5. Being content with what you have, trusting God to provide what you need.
6. Respecting and imitating your leaders in the faith
7. Not getting lured into "new theologies." (Jesus has not, will not, change)
8. like Jesus, never being ashamed of your "outsider" status in this world

Now this is a long list and easily forgotten, so like any good teacher, in verse 15, Paul summarizes what he just summarized.

*Through [Jesus], then, let us **continually** offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.*

Through [Jesus], then, let us CONTINUALLY offer a sacrifice of praise to God. This is what pleases Him:

- ❖ ***lips that confess his name.***
- ❖ ***not neglecting to do good***
- ❖ ***sharing what you have,***

Did you notice that we are to **continually** be offering God our sacrifice of praise? In other words **we are to be continually WORSHIPPING God which is a whole lot more than attending a single Sunday worship service.**

“Continually” means 24 hours a day, seven days of the week. But, to reasonable, if we first subtract 8 hours a day for sleep, another 3 for eating and such, and then that one hour of Sunday worship, We will have a more manageable 12 hours daily in which to offer our continual worship to God

But how can anyone continually worship God - 12 hours daily - for the rest of their lives?

Thankfully, Paul does not leave us guessing. In his summary of the summary he lists out three very direct ways for us to fill our day with continual worship.

By Confessing our faith (*witnessing*)
By doing good for others
And By sharing what we have.

Let’s briefly look at each in turn.

As a daily act of worship we need to be confessing the name of Jesus.

The old deacon was once again leading in prayer and saying the very same words, every week, that everyone had come to expect him to say. But when he got to the part where he said: “*Oh Lord, touch the unsaved with Thy finger,*” suddenly he stopped and stood there very quiet, very still.

Other members rushed to his side and asked if he were ill, if he were ok?

“Yes,” he replied, I’m fine. But right there in the middle of my prayer, something seemed to say to me, “***You are that finger.***”

The Deacon was right. We are the finger of God that is responsible for touching the unsaved, and we cannot touch them if we never share the Name of Jesus with others, never have lips that confess His name.

So as an exercise about confessing – with your lips – that which you love, take a moment to think about something, someone, you really love.

Have you ever noticed how often, talk of what you really love just comes up naturally in your daily conversations; even though the conversation had started off in a different direction. I had a friend in college that loved canoe camping as much as I do; this was the highlight of our summers. So, no matter whenever we talked or what else we talked about, the conversation would eventually come around to canoeing; whether memories from the previous trip or dreams of the next.

Now think of your love for God. How often does that enter into your daily conversations?

In view of what Jesus has done for us, should not God be the number one love of our lives. And if that is the case, shouldn't talk about God naturally enter just about every conversation we have?

Sadly, when people think about "*confessing the name of Jesus,*" we usually think only of the negative stereotypes: of Elmer Gantry, or some hypocritical, narrow-minded soapbox preacher. Our cultural media has done a marvelous job of communicating only negative images of "evangelical Christians" (*and if you don't think that this has been intentional – then you are truly naive*).

So now, being afraid of seeming pushy or overly religious, we silence all talk about God unless we are in a church setting. We don't want people putting us in that box labeled "religious fanatic". After all, we make the excuse that since God knows our hearts and how we feel towards Him, we don't need to use words. And while this is true, how can others come to know the love of God unless we speak of it publicly? If we are to disciple the nations, we have to open our mouths.

Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans: *For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved ... But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?*
Romans 10:10-14

Along with Paul, Peter urges us to *in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord and Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you* (1 Peter 3.15)

Confessing Jesus with our lips shows his importance to us, our gratefulness for what He has done, and ***that we are not ashamed of the gospel***. For unless we open our mouths, how can other people learn of the love of God.

And, to top it all off, confessing our faith pleases God. When we start including God in our conversations outside of church, this is our service of worship; our sacrifice of praise.

Another daily act of worship is to look for ways we can do good for others.

A small boy was writing a letter to God about the Christmas presents he badly wanted. "***I've been good for six months now,***" he wrote, *I would really like a bike and a new ball glove.* But after a moment's reflection he crossed out the "six months" and wrote in "***three months.***" Then after another pause, that was crossed out and he put "***two weeks.***" Following another pause, that was crossed out as well. Finally he got up from the table and went over to the little Christmas manger scene that the family had set out. He pocketed the small figure of Mary and went back to his writing: "*Jesus, if ever you want to see your mother again, you'll make sure I get a bike and a new ball glove.*"

As Christmas approaches, many children start thinking about improving their behavior, because they have been told that Santa Claus is always watching. He's always checking to see whether they are naughty or nice. So the children try especially hard to be good, in order to get what they want instead of the coal and switches that come along for being bad.

Now, most of us have grown past the Santa phase, but I must tell you that someone is still watching our every action. And this is not seasonal – He is always watching and either rejoicing or grieving over what he sees. Of course I am talking about God.

Both one of the benefits and realities of having God's Holy Spirit living within us is that God always knows both what we are doing and also why we are doing it. So here is another way to continually worship God: through our actions. Since God is watching us – and not from any distance - we should be careful to be obedient and to live a life of praise to God by doing good for others.

Doing good for others is worship. So, like the Boy Scouts why don't we pledge to do at least one good deed daily. That's how to worship God continually through the week, not in words or speech but in truth and action.

- There are plenty of opportunities here in Bedford for you to worship God through your work: once a month, Bedford Presbyterian serves at the Shepherd's Table; giving a hot lunch to whoever is hungry.
- Or you could volunteer at Bedford Christian ministries – they are still looking for help just sorting out clothes.
- Or you could volunteer to drive shut-ins to their appointments with Bedford ride,
- Or you can serve as a volunteer assistant in a At Bedford Primary School, which we have adopted as our personal mission field.

The opportunities to "do good for others" are as varied as your talents and it should be a regular part of the worship you give to God.

So, along with confessing our faith and doing good Paul finally adds that we should be sharing with others

A major company was hiring for a position and had several candidates who were equally qualified for the job opening. To break the tie, they issued a "What would you do challenge?" as part of the interview process. It went something like this. You are driving along in your car on a wild, stormy night. You pass by a bus stop, and you see three people waiting for the bus:

1. An older woman who looks as if she is about to die.
2. An old friend who once saved your life.
3. The perfect man (or) woman you have been dreaming about.

Which one would you choose to offer a ride to, knowing that there could only be one passenger in your car.

This question poses a number of moral and ethical dilemmas. You could pick up the **older woman**, because she is going to die, and thus you should save her life. Or you could take the **old friend** because he once saved your life, and this would be the perfect chance to repay him. However, you may never be able to find your **perfect dream lover** again.

So who among the qualified applicants was hired for the job? It was the one who simply answered: *"I would give the car keys to my old friend, so he can take the lady to the hospital, while I stay behind and wait for the bus with the woman of my dreams."*

You have to admit that this was a brilliant solution to the problem, and there is an important lesson we can take away from it. We are always better off when we are willing to share **everything** God has given us. Just think about it. Because this man had a wise and sharing heart, the old lady got to the hospital, his friend had a ride, and he got to spend an extended time alone with the woman of his dreams. To top it all off, he got the job because of his willingness to share everything.

Basically, God has given us everything we need to survive in this world. The catch is that we must make sure, if he has blessed us with more than our share, that we share it with those who are less fortunate so that they are not left in need.

After all, it is God who has given us all things. He gave us the mind to achieve great things. He gave us our abilities to earn a living. He blesses us with more than we deserve. All things truly belong to God and not to us, so we need to share. When we get to the point where we gladly share even our most prized possessions, we are truly worshipping God.

Confessing our faith, doing good, and sharing, these are all forms of worship that we can be daily, continually, offering up to God. So if you're not getting

anything out of Sunday worship, perhaps it's because you've put nothing in all week long.

Worship has to be more than just an hour on Sundays. We need to grow into a lifestyle of continuous praise that lasts all day, every day.

By joining Jesus in ministry and mission outside the city
By confessing our faith and including God in our daily conversations.
By doing good deeds.
And by sharing with others what God has so richly blessed us with,

This is how we continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise. And this is why "serving others" is our mission and the third point of our purpose statement.

Loving God, Loving others, serving the world, growing disciples.
I pray that you will.