

## Proclaiming the Word of God

### *Honoring 2020 Graduates*

**Scripture:** John 4: 19-26

**Sermon:** Worshipping God in Spirit and Truth

Introduction adapted from: The Imperatives Of Worship, by Brian Bill @ Sermon Central.Com



Welcome back to what will feel like a very different style of worship service from which you were used to. It will be shorter. There are no hymnbooks or Bibles in the pew racks, no cushions on the seats – nothing that cannot be easily cleaned after each event. All needed information will either be up on the monitors or printed in disposable bulletins.

After all these years of urging otherwise, now we are asking you NOT to sing out loud with the hymns, and to stand only for the Prayer of Confession and Apostles Creed – even then we ask you to speak these words quietly to yourself. And most different of all, for communion, everyone had to pick up their own personal packet of juice and wafer for use when the time comes. All this in order to allow a smaller number of people to gather for worship while minimizing the spread of germs.

With all these draconian changes, both Bill Rutledge and I were concerned that you might find this service boring. You might not feel like you have “worshipped” at all. For this reason, we would first share with you some thoughts on what comprises real worship, before we then go on to ask what you have learned from these past 3 months of forced isolation.

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Those of you on Face Book know that there are a couple of our members who love to pass along bad puns – you might say they enjoy pun-ishing us. A similar style of humor that I like are oxymoron’s; self-contradicting phrases that make you stop and think, like: Jumbo shrimp, Freezer burn, White chocolate, Plastic silverware, Sanitary landfills, Professional wrestling. Here’s another self-contradictory phrase: **boring worship**.

This reminds me of the little boy who asked his mother if she could remember the highest number she had ever counted to. Mom couldn’t remember so she asked him about his highest number. He answered, “5,372.” Puzzled, she and asked why he stopped at that particular number. The boy responded, “Well...church was over.”

In various surveys, when people are asked why they don’t go to church, they often reply that church is just boring. While I recognize that sometimes a church service can seem dull, especially to a non-Christian, I want to suggest this morning that real worship is anything but boring. The very essence of what worship is – if we are truly worshipping – does not allow us to be bored. When we come before the majestic God of the universe, who has created everything and has done amazing things in our lives, we can’t help but break into some act of adoration; which is what real worship always should be.

**Real worship only happens every time we actively honor God with our lives.** Let me explain.

If you were to look up the term, “worship” literally means ***to treat somebody or something like a god. To show respect by engaging in acts of prayer and devotion.*** So worship is ANYTHING you DO to demonstrate to God that you honor Him, that you love Him, that you want to live your life in accordance with His wishes. **Also real worship has to begin on your inside. At its truest form, worship is a personal communication between your spirit and God’s Spirit.**

Now whatever is happening on the outside may enhance your worship like singing, praying, studying your Bible, listening to a sermon, or serving in the local food pantry or with Habitat for Humanity. **But without the internal connection, NOTHING you are doing on the outside even qualifies as worship.**

You may be the best singer in the chancel choir, you may preach loudly on the street corner every Friday afternoon, but if your spirit is not connected with and honoring God at the same time, then you’re just playacting and God knows the difference, because He is always looking past the outside to the internal honesty behind your actions.

That is why Jesus openly accused the Pharisees of practicing false religion, empty worship, saying *“This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.”* (Matthew 15:8-9).

So to say this quite plainly. While what you may be doing on the outside may lead you to real worship: singing, praying, meditating, ministering, it can only enhance your worship but not replace it. Similarly if you are truly worshipping then nothing happening on the outside can detract from that worship taking place on your inside.

That is why the words “boring worship” are not only an oxymoron they are also an impossibility; for no act of real worship can ever be boring – either to you or God – no matter where you may be, no matter how flat the soloist or how long-winded the preacher. True worship only happens between you and God and you are the only one who can make it real or fake, but never boring.

That is what Jesus told the woman at the well.

TRUE WORSHIPPERS will worship the Father in SPIRIT and TRUTH, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. John 4:23

You know the story of “the woman at the well.” Jesus leaves Jerusalem headed back north to Galilee, but for some reason scripture records that He HAD to go through Samaria. Yes, we know that Samaria was actually a shortcut, but no respectable Jew would voluntarily walk through that territory because the Samaritans were half-breeds who practiced what Jews thought was a degenerate form of their religion (Yes prejudice was just as alive back then as it remains today – even among the most religious of people). But for Jesus, it wasn’t just a short cut or to prove his religious tolerance, there was some other reason that he HAD to travel into this region.

For today's "aha" moment. I propose to you, more than what you learned in Sunday School, is that Jesus HAD to go through Samaria because He was looking to have this very conversation with this very woman; the clue to Jesus' quest is in what He said to her... that the Father was SEEKING those people who would worship Him in spirit and in truth.

So God, through Jesus intentionally sought out this most despised woman in a despised village, because she was one who would "worship the Father in spirit and in truth." I suspect she already had the spirit part right, worshipping God as best she knew how; longing for the coming of the Messiah. Jesus just had to set her on the path to the truth.... which was exactly what He did and exactly what she did thereafter! Do you realize that this Samaritan woman was the only person to whom Jesus ever revealed Himself as being the Messiah?

But we are getting ahead of the story. As the Samaritan woman approaches, Jesus engages her in conversation, which has already crossed several taboo lines, especially when He lets her know that He knows just what kind of life she has been living up until now. But with no hint of judgment or condescension Jesus still offers to quench the spiritual thirst that she must have had for a long time.

Of course feeling guilty, defensive, for her lifestyle, she quickly tries to deflect Him by raising the ages old argument over who goes to the right church. Are Baptists naturally more holy than Presbyterians? Do Catholics have a shortcut to heaven? But Jesus will not be distracted. He points out that real worship has nothing to do with either the location or style of worship. **While real Worship has everything to do with worshipping only the Father in Spirit and truth.**

So let's briefly cover these three points of REAL WORSHIP. First real worship must be pointed towards the only true God. That sounds obvious but think of all the false worship that is going on around our world – treating other things like they are god.

- First there are all the other religions in the world. No matter how passionate, how sincere, how dedicated the worshipper may be, if they are treating something else like god when it isn't the real God, then their worship is false and empty.
- What about all the other personal idols that people "give respect and show devotion to:" wealth, fame, fancy homes, expensive cars, playboy lifestyle; the list is quite extensive.

That was the main problem for the Samaritan woman...she obviously wanted to worship God, she just had never learned the right way to do so, thinking that it was tied to a place or a ritual. That is why Jesus sought her out ... to point her not only to the one true God but also to God who wanted a parent/child relationship with her.

This was certainly the type of God that the Samaritan woman needed in her life. One who would care for her, give her life hope and worth, no matter what the neighbors thought of her. **This is also exactly the God that we all need in our life; one who will lovingly relate to us as a parent with a child. Which is why I think that Jesus made a point of always naming God as "Father"** not only in this conversation at the well but in all His other conversations as well. I challenge you to read through the Gospels and find out how many times Jesus uses the word "Father" to describe not only who God is, but also the loving familial relationship He wants to have with each of us.

I could spend a whole sermon talking about the parent/child relationship God wants to have with you and how it will make both your life so much better and your worship so much truer. But I must also touch upon these last two points, what does it mean to worship the **FATHER** in **SPIRIT** and in **TRUTH**.

We have already touched upon the “TRUTH” part of real worship by noting that God is always “looking behind the curtain” to see the actual intent behind what you may be calling worship.

- No matter how correct your theology, or how many Bible verses you may have memorized, you sit in church mindlessly mouthing religious words without letting them turn your thoughts towards honoring God then you are not truly worshipping God.
- And no matter how religious you are on Sundays, if you go through your weekdays without ever thinking to thank God for life He has given you and to let that motivate you to serve others then you are not truly worshipping God.

That’s the truth part of real worship, the SPIRIT part of real worship asks how passionate are you in pursuing your relationship with God your Father?

Think about who Jesus was as God in the flesh. He was a passionate man. When called to the ministry He followed His convictions to the very end of His life. He openly wept, I am sure He also laughed just as heartily. He passionately called out hypocrisy wherever He saw it. He also sought out passionate people, usually passionate sinners – like the woman at the well – whom He could transform into passionate followers. And He loved parties, He told stories about parties, He even made more wine when the party ran out. Though it wasn’t true, He at least gave the Pharisees some basis for accusing him of being a drunkard and a glutton (Matthew 11:19). Jesus attracted passionate people like Mary of Magdala, Zacchaeus and yes even Judas. His most passionate of followers then went on to become His apostles: people like Peter, John, and Paul.

That is why Paul in so many of his many letters urges people to live passionately for God; “living sacrifices holy and acceptable to God”, forgetting what is behind and pressing on to what is ahead, getting to know Christ and living your life for Him as if you had been brought back from the dead – because that is what He did for you.

In the book of Revelation, Jesus wrote to one of his churches, ‘I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth (revelation 3:15-16). In other words, lukewarm Christians make God sick to His stomach.

Worshipping God the Father in spirit and in truth means committing your whole life to passionately following after Jesus, always seeking to say and do those things that honor God the Father.

So real worship has nothing to do with your place of worship, your style of worship, with raised hands or bowed heads and certainly not with how loud or softly you sing. These things only serve to help or hinder, hide or reveal, the true nature of worship that is going on inside, just between you and God alone. That is why, like the woman at the well, Jesus sought you out,

forgave you, rebirthed you, and called you into his family ... so that you might live your whole life passionately as an act of worship for the God who equally passionately loves you.

I can think of one more oxymoron this morning. Here it is: **A Bored Christian**. If you truly understand that being a believer is all about living your life as a living sacrifice to God, then it should be impossible to be bored. So, stop just sitting in church.

Start singing – even if quietly,  
Sharing your faith fervently,  
Praying constantly  
and serving others as if working for Jesus Himself.  
I guarantee you will never be bored again.

### ***Worship Song***

*“This is the Time”*

Praise Team

### **Response to the Word of God**

#### ***Affirmation of Faith***

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. On the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

#### ***Invitation to Communion***

#### ***Hymn of Preparation***

*“Let Us Break Bread Together”*

Praise Team

#### ***Pastoral Prayer & Lord's Prayer:***

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen

#### ***Sacrament of the Lord's Supper***

#### ***Sharing of Joys and Concerns***

#### ***Closing Prayer***

What can we take from this time of worship to really heal a broken world? Can our hour of prayer and song transform our hearts and minds to doing Your work in the world? In faith, we trust that we can and we will. Bless now our intentions and our offerings, Holy God. Bless now our lives and our commitments. By Your Spirit, reform our lives into ones worthy of the task You place before us. In the spirit of Jesus our Christ, we pray. Amen.