

Series: The Invitational Church
Today: The Where, Why and How of Worship
Text: Psalm 150

A Brief Message preached by The Rev. Randolph T. Riggs, D.Min.
Sunday, May 18, 2008 (Arts Appreciation Sunday)
First Presbyterian Church of Lancaster, PA

At the center of the Princeton Theological Seminary sits a white building with columns which is known as Miller Chapel; a colonial chapel where seminarians have been holding worship services every morning since it was built in 1834. The chapel was remodeled in 2000, but it remains as austere today as it was in the late 1960's when Cherie and I were on the campus. The windows are clear tinted glass. There are few adornments to either enhance or detract from worship. There is no stained glass; no Tiffany windows. Even the Celtic cross is small and unobtrusive. It stands on a pole next to the pulpit and looks almost like an afterthought.

The pulpit stands in the center to remind seminarians of the centrality of the preached word in Reformed Theology, but, were it not for the organ, which in the 2000 renovation was moved to the center behind the pulpit, one would not know if he/she were in a colonial meeting house or a church. Worship and the arts have only begun to be explored on the campus of this, the "mother ship" of Presbyterian seminaries, so imagine nearly 200 years of pastors who have been trained to believe that the primary reason that people come to church is to hear a sermon.

We need look no further than our text for this morning to understand that there is more to worship than a sermon. Please don't get me wrong. I believe in the power of the spoken word or I would not subject you to it every week. However, I also believe that the Psalmist gives us three essentials of our worship: the where, why and how.

Where?

The where is anywhere. We are to praise God in this sanctuary and we are to praise God when we are out of doors. Anywhere we are is meant to be the place where God is worshipped. When we come to the Sanctuary, this is the place God is to be worshipped. When we are out in nature, this is where God is to be worshipped.

I love this church. I love to show it off. When tourists stop by and I happen on them in the foyer, I love to bring them into this sanctuary and watch their eyes get wide as they witness its beauty. As one of them said to me just this week, *“It can’t be hard to feel the presence of God in here,”* and they are right. It is not hard to feel the presence of God in here.

However, God is not limited to this sanctuary. Two years ago this month I was on the Colorado River experiencing the grandeur of God’s creation, and around every bend in the river there was an utterance of praise. One need only to watch the creative process that is taking place in nature right now to understand the words of the beloved hymn, *This is my Father’s World*. *“All nature sings and round me rings the music of the spheres.”*

Where do we worship God? We worship God everywhere!

Why?

Why do we worship God? Because God is worthy of our praise. The Westminster Catechism begins with the question, *“What is the chief end of humankind?”* And the answer that is given: *“The chief end of human beings is to glorify God and enjoy God forever.”* The Psalmist reminds us that we were created to worship God and to give God our thanks and praise for God’s mighty deeds and surpassing greatness.

I had a conversation with a physician the other day which confirmed this. We were talking about a particular situation where the person was not supposed to live, but she did. I asked the doctor if he could explain what happened, and he said, "That is really your business, not mine. Our bodies were created to heal. The best that medicine can do is assist in the process which has been established by the creator."

God is worthy of our praise which is why we worship God.

How?

The how of worship is limitless. Worship was never meant to be limited to words. The sermon is important, but it is not the only thing that is important. The Psalmist gives us a laundry list of musical instruments which were designed to offer praise, and the psalmist includes dance as an important aspect of offering ourselves to God without words.

In the Broadway play *My Fair Lady*, Eliza is courted by a man named Freddy. Freddy writes her love letters every day. But Eliza's response to all of these written promises is to cry out in frustration: *"Words! Words! I'm so sick of words! Don't talk of stars burning above! If you're in love, show me! Don't talk of love lasting through time. Make no undying vow. If you love me, show me now!"*

This morning we have seen but a few different expressions of people who help us worship beyond words. Where did we ever get the idea that words were the only way? Musicians have given us great music which has lifted us and challenged us in ways words could never reach us. Dancers have helped us catch an entirely different understanding of the Acts 2 (the first Pentecost), and were you not moved in a different way to experience that? Instrumentalists help support us in our singing and take us to a new

level of inspiration with their musical interpretations. Outside our sanctuary today is a rich buffet of the visual arts which draw us into new levels of spirituality. Every Saturday Janet Snyder is here creating these masterpiece floral arrangements which draw our attention away from ourselves to give glory to their God who created them.

The glory of God is revealed in far more ways than our words and our thoughts. This is why we sing! This is why we dance! This is why we worship! Where? Anywhere. Why? Because God deserves it. How? In whatever way we can to say, I love you!