

Today begins a sermon series that will carry us through the end of August. It is called THE WHY OF WORSHIP. Its purpose is to allow us to take a deep dive into the elements of worship. We'll lay the groundwork for the series by exploring questions like:

7/5 - What is Worship - Why do you show up? Why does the world need us to show up?

7/12 - What do our denominations say about Why we worship?

7/19 - Why do we have an order to our worship?

And then we will go through each element movement of worship

7/26 - Call to Worship

8/2 - Confession and Assurance

8/9 - Prayer and Singing

8/16 - Affirmations of Faith / Confessions

8/23 - The Word and the Interpretation (ie. sermon)

8/30 - The Response + Sending - Offering of our time, talents, and treasure

As I thought about WHY we worship, the two passages Jim read came to mind. Each story speaks of a moment of redemption when the protagonist of the story knew without a doubt that God was near them, and had personally blessed them.

We're a bit more familiar with Jacob's backstory than we are with the woman who anointed Jesus' feet.

Jacob is a twin. He and Esau are the grandsons of Abraham and Sarah, and sons of Isaac and Rebekah. An important element to the story is that as the twins came out of their mother Rebekah's womb, Jacob was said to be holding onto his brother's heel. He is grasping to be first from the earliest moments of his life. They name him Jacob (ya'aqōb), which means, "he grasps the heel," or figuratively, "he deceives." Jacob was the one who tricked his brother and then his father out of Esau's birthright.

In Genesis 27 Esau says to his father, 'Isn't he rightly named Jacob (ya'aqōb)? He has deceived (‘āqab) me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing!'" (27:35-36)

Jacob was a scoundrel, a scamp. One who would do whatever it took to receive what he wanted. Surely his parents taught him about the covenant made between God and his grandparents Abraham and Sarah, but he forsook that promise and relationship in order to go his own way, and in so doing destroyed his relationship with his brother.

It is on his way to meet up with Esau – and face the consequences for his deceit – that Jacob has the dream of God being present with him. This is called a “theophany” – a visible manifestation to humankind of the Divine; with God assuring this prodigal child that, “I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

On the face, that appearance could have been a comfort. However, in his heart, Jacob knew what he had done – who he thought he was – and he began to fear what sort of reckoning might be present. His response is a well-known refrain, 16 “Surely God is

in this place—and I did not know it!” The account continues, “¹⁷ And he was afraid and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.’”

“Awesome” is an apt description of that moment, because it is beyond the capability of wrapping one's mind and heart around it. “How amazing is it that God would deem to come so close to *me*?” one might ask. “But, then again, knowing myself, how close do I really want God to get?”

So, Jacob’s best reaction was to ritualize the moment. No matter what, God has indeed come near to him, and so he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it – anointing it, hallowing it, *naming it* “the house of God – Beth El.”

In the gospel story, the woman at the dinner held in Jesus’ “honor,” recognizes that “the Lord is in *that* place.” She doesn’t dwell on what she’s done, or who others say she is. She recognizes Jesus for who *Jesus* is. And she trusts him. She trusts him so much, she ritualizes the moment. Instead of a stone being anointed, she anoints Jesus. Right there in front of everyone, she offers a ritual of recognition that Jesus is Sovereign and Savior of the world. In this recognition, Jesus commends her saying that by the act of anointing, she “has shown great love.” And Jesus concludes with a blessing for her: “Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

At the very heart of our faith, I believe this is why we worship.

We are broken like Jacob.

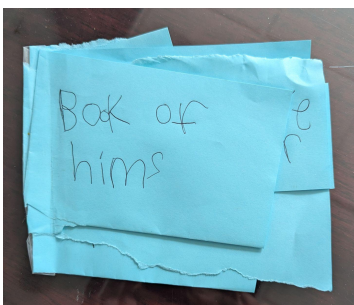
We are full of sin like the woman.

AND, we are redeemed – nudged to be the beautifully and wonderfully made creatures God intended.

By whatever means we have come to understand that God will not leave us until God has done what God promised. We choose to gather together, quoting Philippians 2:12-13, “12 with great respect to walk the path Creator has given you *for being set free and made whole*. 13 For the Great Spirit is creating in you the desire and strength to do what pleases (God).” (First Nations Version, emphasis added) Indeed, by the grace of God we are saved and commissioned to live our lives in peace.

Thanks to last week’s worship service I received a tactile theological understanding for why we worship. One of our Christian ancestors, Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430CE), famously wrote in Latin, “Qui cantat, bis orat” (One who sings, prays twice), explaining that adding music to praise allows a person to express both joyful devotion and the love of God simultaneously. Our church fulfilled this proclamation many times last week during the hymnsing. What you probably do not know is that while folks were singing, and Barb was sharing Keith’s reflections about the hymns, a hymnal was being created. Actually, it was called “Book of Hims,” and it was composed by Juliana.

The hymnal looks like this



My understanding is that the “Book of Hims” is a melding together of words of praise composed by Juliana herself. It reads,

Unite us god, unite us god / we lift awr voses up to you.

As you cum down on us, awr savyor / O god we lif owr vois up to you.

O god awr savyor he dided for us / he dided on the cros /

Thank you for evrething you did for us / you lift yor hat(heart???) to us.

{Keith, I wonder if you could work with Juliana to set this to music???

Because this was written by a child, we might be tempted to end our response to this book as “cute.” But my siblings in Christ, I need you to understand what a profound statement Juliana’s book makes about church worship. This book is PRECISELY the reason why we worship. We have been handed a message about the love of God through Christ Jesus that sets people free and makes us whole. We gather for corporate worship so that we can remind ourselves of that message on a weekly basis – when we are already feeling whole, but even more so when we are feeling at our most broken or deceptive. Our statements of faith speak this truth. But what is most essential is that our hearts KNOW this truth.

Juliana’s “Book of Hims” bears witness to the fact that we are doing that work to a good degree of success.

If our children are gleaning the understanding of God’s love for us and for the world through Christ then we are doing something right, during this hour and beyond!

Through this book of hymns, Juliana is praying twice – through her words and by committing her words in a sharable fashion. Her work is a reflection of our ministry – but even more so it is a testimony to the power of the love of a God who is willing to work with us until God has done what God has promised us.

Until then we find as many ways as possible to show our gratitude and devotion to the only one who has the capacity to make us who we were created to be.

Now let us turn to the table, where we can receive the physical and spiritual expression of this grace, and the sustenance to carry that gift into the world.