



ANGLICAN CHURCH OF PAPHOS

## Lent Course 2025 A Deeper Walk

### Week 3 WORSHIP (Psalm 95:1-7)

25 March 2025 - Revd Paul A. Carr

#### What Is Worship?

We use the word 'worship' throughout our Christian life, but what do we understand the term worship to mean?

#### QUESTION How would you define worship?

Michael Perham, former Bishop of Gloucester says *"Worship is the offering to God of praise, glory and honour in reverence and in love. It is something that can be done in community or distanced from community, in church or in a thousand other contexts."*

Richard Foster: *"To worship is to experience reality, to touch Life. It is to know, to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community: It is breaking into the Shekinah of God, or better yet, being invaded by the Shekinah of God."* ('Shekinah' means the glory or the radiance of God dwelling in the midst of his people. It denotes the immediate Presence of God as opposed to a God who is abstract or aloof. (Foster).

#### The Object Of Our Worship

Jesus answers for all time the question of whom we are to worship, Luke 4:8: *"It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only'".* Jesus was quoting from the Law which God gave to Moses: *Fear the Lord your God, serve him only ... Do not follow other gods, the gods of the people around you."* (Deut 6:13) The one true God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God whom Jesus Christ revealed. God made clear his hatred for all idolatries by placing an incisive command at the start of the Ten Commandments "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod.20:3).

We desperately need to see who God is to read about his revelation of himself to the people Israel, to meditate on his attributes, to gaze upon the revelation of his nature in Jesus Christ. We worship the Lord not only because of who he is, but also because of what he has done. Above all, the God of the Bible is the God who acts. His goodness, faithfulness, justice, mercy all can be seen in his dealings with his people. His gracious actions are not only etched into ancient history but are engraved into our personal histories. As the apostle Paul says, the only reasonable response is worship (Rom. 12:1).

#### The Priority Of Worship

If the Lord is to be *Lord*, worship must have priority in our lives. The *first* commandment of Jesus is, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30).

## Who Are The Worshipers?

God is actively seeking worshippers. When Jesus met with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:23-24) He said to her: *Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in Spirit and in truth*".

It is God who seeks, draws, persuades. Worship is the human response to the divine initiative. In Genesis God walked in the garden, seeking out Adam and Eve. In the crucifixion Jesus drew men and women to himself (John 12:32). Scripture is replete with examples of God's efforts to initiate, restore, and maintain fellowship with his children. God is like the father of the prodigal who upon seeing his son a long way off, rushed to welcome him home.

True worshippers are often forged in times of trouble and despair. It is quite easy for us to worship God when things are going well, but a true worshipper will praise and worship God through both good and bad experiences in life. The Psalms of David are not all uplifting - many are full of lament because of the many difficult situations in which he found himself. But David was one of the greatest worshippers in the Bible. Remember how God said that David was a man after His own heart (Acts 13:22; 1 Sam 13:14).

## What Worship Is Not!

Worship is not the slow song that the choir sings. Worship is not the amount we place in the offering. Worship is not volunteering to read the bible or lead intercessions on a Sunday. These may be acts or expressions of worship, but they do not define what true worship really is.

Worship is not liturgy! Liturgy comes from the Greek (leitourgia) meaning a public duty, or service, to the state undertaken by a citizen. We use liturgy as a means of serving God in communal or public worship. We can worship without church on our own; we can worship without liturgy on our own, but the moment we engage in worship with others there is a shared form, and that is where liturgy comes in. Liturgy is usually a blend of word, song, movement, gesture and silence that enables the people of God to worship together. All churches have a liturgy whether it is written down or not. Opening prayers, songs, bible readings, sermon, prayers.

Liturgy, to me, must be honest, open, joyful, enables us to engage with God, Biblically based, creating a sense of community and shared purpose, free of clutter, and Trinitarian in content. We all want to celebrate the liturgy well, to experience good, uplifting, and meaningful worship. Prior to joining the CoffE, I'd never used a written liturgy in my life. I found it refreshing and meaningful and full of scripture. But I struggle when liturgy is said by rote and it can often become stagnant when we lose something of the awe and wonder in repetition – in Matthew 6:7, Jesus warned against meaningless repetition in prayer. You may have noticed that I always take my time when leading liturgy to try and make it more meaningful.

Liturgy is a way into the Church's corporate worship of God, but liturgy alone does not produce worship. We can have all the right words and formats and know them off by heart (and, of course, the way we prefer to worship is God's way) but we have not worshipped until the Spirit of God touches our spirit.

Richard Foster: *We need not be overly concerned with the question of a correct form for worship. The issue of high liturgy or low liturgy, this form or that form is peripheral rather than central. We are encouraged in this perception when we realize that nowhere does the New Testament prescribe a particular form for worship. In fact, what we find is a freedom that is incredible for people with such deep roots in the synagogue liturgical system. They had the reality. When Spirit touches spirit the issue of forms is wholly secondary.*

In Isaiah 6:1-13, Isaiah is in the temple, sharing in worship, and he gets so caught up in this earthly, liturgical worship that he is transported to the heavenly places and finds himself drawn into worship and the conversation of heaven.

This is liturgical worship at its very best – it holds the possibility of grasping the heel of heaven. It's wanting to grasp the heel of heaven that matters, wanting above all else to be in communion with God, singing his praises, offering our prayers, and having that sense of being touched by his holiness. For Isaiah the liturgy he entered into when he came to the Temple to worship, led him to an experience of true worship.

**QUESTION** Share an experience when you have felt 'caught up' in worship.

### What Is True Worship?

True worship is defined by the priority we place on *who* God is in our lives. "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength*" (Deut 6.5, Mark 12.30). Worship, it seems to me, is the most important activity church members share together. It means engaging with God. It involves honouring; serving; respect; faith; obedience; adoration etc. It is something we do 24/7 not just on a Sunday. In 1 Thessalonians 5, the Apostle Paul says worship involves:

**a) Prayer, vs17:** See week 1 for more information on the importance of prayer.

**b) Praise, vs18:** *Give thanks in all circumstances* ... thanksgiving is a vital element of worship. We may not always feel like praising, praying or giving thanks. Our circumstances may not be conducive to doing those things, yet we are to do so, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

**c) Singing:** Praise involves words, but it also involves singing. Singing in church matters. Here are a few reasons why: 1) *The Bible commands us to sing to the Lord.* God's glory compels us. 2) *Our God is a singing God.* Matthew 26:30, "*And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*" Before Jesus was given up to be crucified, he sang with his disciples. 3) *Singing engages our memory.* The songs we sing shape us and form us - primarily because we remember them. They stick with us. Through joyful times and dark times, they provide us with an anchor of hope. Music is such a powerful medium. 4) *Singing engages our emotions.* And whilst we don't want to worship emotionalism, singing in our worship helps us find the best outlet for our emotions. 5) *Singing is an overflow of seeing!* I once heard someone say a healthy church is a singing church. Because the overflow of seeing God at work is to praise Him for his vast excellencies. The more we see, the more we want to sing and be in the presence of such an amazing God. 6) *Singing unites a congregation.* It's the best way to bring together a large group of people from diverse backgrounds and experiences and focus them on a single goal. Just as if you went to a football match or a concert.

**e) The Word of God, vs19-21:** See week 2 for more information on the importance of God's Word as a spiritual discipline. Worship that ignores the Bible is not spiritual. It may be emotional but unless there is spiritual truth, the Holy Spirit is not at work. Jesus taught (John 4) that worship must engage our heart and minds. A marriage of 'Word and Spirit' of intellect (Truth) and emotions (Spirit), which is both healthy and complimentary.

**QUESTION** How can we cultivate 'holy expectancy' in our worship?

Richard Foster makes four suggestions about how you can gain the most from attending church:

1. Arrive for Church early, lift your heart in adoration to Christ. Contemplate his tenderness.
2. Picture the vision that Isaiah had of the Lord 'high and lifted up' or John had of Christ with eyes 'like a flame of fire' and voice like the sound of many waters' (Isaiah 6; Rev 1).
3. Hold service leaders before the Shekinah of God's radiance. Release them to speak the truth boldly and in power.
4. Glance around as people enter. Does someone look sad or deep in thought? Lift and hold them in prayer throughout the service.

### What About Church?

The Greek word for church is *Ekklesia* which is where we get the word 'ecclesiastical.' It means 'an assembly' or 'gathering of people' - community. Meeting together with other Christians, on a regular basis, is central to the Christian faith and the importance of doing so is confirmed time and time again throughout the Bible. Yes, you can watch online and offline. But being onsite is where we are meant to be! Everyone has their own ideas of what they expect the perfect church to be and what they can get out of it. What might the perfect church look like to you? *If you ever find the perfect church, don't join it. Why? because you'll spoil it!* The writer of Hebrews urges his readers: *Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another* (Hebrews 10:25). There seems to have been three types of gathering in the Bible: the small, the medium-sized and the large. All of equal importance.

**Congregation:** This refers to the weekly Sunday gathering. A place where you feel welcome, a place where you will fit in. A place where you feel comfortable and where you can grow in faith and become an active church member. However, church isn't always about what happens on Sundays. It isn't easy for friendships to develop before/after a service which is why we need ...

**Cell:** or Home Group. These consist of a small group of people who gather, regularly, in someone's home, to study the Bible, pray, and encourage one another. It is a place where meaningful, and lasting, friendships can be made. It is also a place where you can develop your faith in an atmosphere of encouragement and acceptance; a place where you are free to make mistakes. It is a place where you can develop your spiritual gifts. I'd love to see Home Groups set up here - let me know if you're interested in joining or hosting or leading a Home Group! Hand out!

**Celebration:** This could be said to represent large gatherings, or conferences, such as Spring Harvest or New Wine where 100's/1000's of Christians gather in one place. There's something significant about events like this – the critical mass - it helps to restore our confidence when we feel isolated, as Christians, in our community.

One of the greatest definitions of worship I've stumbled upon is by William Temple, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, who said: *To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open up the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.*

**QUESTION** If we truly believe that Christ is alive and present among his people, what practical difference might that make in your approach to worship?



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