

## 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost, Year C

9 October 2022

What is Christian worship?

This is a question that would yield a variety of diverse answers, depending upon who you ask, especially in the church. One of the first ministries that I was asked to participate in upon becoming a regular churchgoer was as a member of the Worship Team (this was not an Anglican church, but a community church that was functionally evangelical and non-denominational). The primary activities of this team were centered around offering the music for weekly services. We met twice a week for rehearsals, and lead songs with voice and instrument on Sunday mornings. As my ministry as a member of this team took place during early formational years as a Christian, I learned to think of worship as being synonymous with contemporary praise and worship music. What is worship? It's what I was doing while leading those songs.

Fast-forward to a few years later, I was serving on another worship team when the leader challenged us to think of what it meant for us to be worship leaders apart from offering a music ministry. The other team members and I were honestly a bit stumped. We didn't know what this might look like. How were we to offer leadership in an area of ministry that we could not fully apprehend?

If you have been an Anglican for some time, perhaps you equate worship with our liturgical tradition. Most Sunday mornings, following the announcements, I invite you to quiet your hearts and minds as we prepare to worship together. What is meant by this? Is worship the sum of the readings, hymns, prayers, confession, the Eucharist, and so forth? Is worship our intentions as we participate in these things?

One of the great things about our Anglican tradition is that we really mean what we say when we confess our belief in the communion of saints. That is, we truly believe that the Spirit is living and active with us as we ponder these things, as the Spirit has been living and active with those who have asked these questions before us; on whose shoulders we stand.

When asked, what is worship, father of the Reformation Martin Luther responded: "The tenth leper." We look to our gospel reading from Luke this morning to unpack what he means by this.

The story of Jesus healing the ten lepers is so rich in its content that we could spend the whole morning talking about all the details and their significance (*don't worry...we won't!*). A few details are important to contextualize this event of healing.

First, Luke notes at the outset that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. We know what happens to Jesus in Jerusalem; he will be tried, tortured, and crucified. Therefore, he will not be coming back this way again during his earthly ministry. Time for that is running out. Secondly, he is going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. This is an odd route for him to be taking

to the Holy City. It is not practical or direct. In fact, it's kind of a no-man's land; a liminal space. Why would he go this way? Not to his benefit, but for the benefit of others.

It is here that he enters a village where there are ten men with a skin disease (some translations call it leprosy). In their relation to Christ, these men occupy liminal space within this liminal space; Luke tells us that they approach him, but also that they keep their distance. They are stuck on the margins. From here, they call out: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" If these men were suffering from the symptoms of leprosy, this might have been a very challenging thing for them to do as the illness can affect the voice. Physical actions that we find difficult requires intent. I pick up objects that I want all the time without even really thinking about it. My one-year-old son is still developing his fine motor skills. When he wants an object, he reaches for it and grasps it with great intent. So too the men who cry out to Jesus do so with great intent.

Luther writes that the actions of these men help us to understand what faith is. Faith is not a static thing in the soul; it is more than believing that God is God. Here we observe what a thoroughly living and powerful thing faith is; it makes us expectant for all grace from God. Faith receives.

As faith receives, love gives. Love is the response of Jesus to the cries of these men. As he sees them, he tells them to go and show themselves to the priests. As they go, they are healed. He directs the lepers to the priests so that they are not deprived of any of their rights. They had been forced to live apart from their community, having been unclean, but now made clean (cf. Leviticus 13).

It is tempting to stand on the sidelines of this story and feel mortified by the fact that nine people experience life-changing healing and do not think to turn back and say thank you. Our Canadian cultural value of politeness is easily offended by this. However, we must consider the context of Jewish culture in the middle east of the first century. Last week, as we heard in Old Testament lesson for Harvest Thanksgiving, Deuteronomy recounts how the people bring their offerings of first fruits to God by handing their baskets to the priests, who bring them to the altar. Their Thanksgiving to the Lord is done through the priest. These men who have been healed may well have been on their way to say 'thank you' in the way that they had been taught to do.

It is curiously disobedient of the tenth man to turn back, as he is now *not* doing at Jesus had instructed, that is 'go' and 'show'. Instead, he turns back (which interestingly is the definition of repentance). This time near to Jesus, this time with a loud voice now that he is healed. He praises God and gives thanks, not through the priests, but at the feet of our Sympathetic High Priest. Perhaps it is being a foreigner, a Samaritan, that allows him to apprehend more easily who Jesus is: not just one who offers the healing of God, but very God of very God.

Jesus tells him that his faith has made him well. His faith has received again; more than healing this time: he has been made whole. He understands who Jesus is and this truly changes everything.

If we believe in the Gospel, that Jesus is who he reveals himself to be, this changes everything. It is the lens through which we see our world. It is the overarching belief that guides each decision that we make. If Jesus is very God of very God, we live as though these things are true: nothing can separate us from his love; everything that is more powerful than us is under his feet; we are chosen; we are a people set apart; death is not the end of our story; we are being reconciled in him; we are loved, beyond our comprehension or imagination. Living every moment of our lives as though all these things are true, that Jesus is who he reveals himself to be, that is worship.

As we continue in worship together, gathered here this morning, may we do so faithfully, ready to receive what His love gives.

Amen.