

Worship is Continuous

John's vision reveals that worship neither begins nor ends with us. The worship of God goes on all around us at every moment, upheld by heavenly beings. And praise of the Creator runs through the whole of Creation; its very being bears constant, worshipful witness to the One who conceived and birthed it. The worship of God is a mighty stream, invisible to us most of the time, yet running, raging, skipping, singing through the universe. . .

. . . Our worship is not a matter of initiating the praise of God, nor of creating something new, nor of generating a particular feeling in the congregation. We simply step into the stream of praise that began before the world was made. We take our turn. When we finish and leave the church on the way to lunch, worship has not ceased. Only our conscious, active part has concluded for the time being. Elsewhere someone has taken up the strain. But even if every church on the planet fell silent, the stream of God's worship would continue flowing mightily, sustained by heavenly beings and the created order itself.

The consideration for us, then, is how we may best complement the ongoing praise of God, adding the harmonies of our own unique voices and our particular expressions of the body of Christ. We hope to flow with the stream, not against it. We hope to bear our part well so God may be honored, and so that others praising God who overhear us will be pleased and moved to deeper worship. The splendid, multivoiced praise of God does not require us, but it is enhanced by our contributions.

. . . First, we must note the importance of our mere presence at worship. Our bodies in the pews add to the praise of God. We bear witness that we are here and not elsewhere. We are in the sanctuary of God and not at our desks or in bed, not washing the car or hiking in the mountains. Presence makes a powerful statement, particularly in a culture which increasingly does not assume that people will be in church on Sunday mornings.

Our attendance at worship swells the stream. A stone thrown into a river displaces water and causes it to rise. Our bodies do the same to the river of God's praise. Tired, coerced, distracted, or grouchy as we may be from the dash to get everyone ready, showing up is important. We may take comfort in the thought that having a bad day at church does not diminish the significance of our presence. It remains a witness to the world and to the heavens.

- Gerrit Scott Dawson, "Stepping into the Stream", an article appearing in the July/August 1995 Weavings (Volume X, Number 4), page 33-34