

## **GRACE FOR THE JOURNEY--WORSHIP**

**Genesis 2:1-3**

**Exodus 20:8-11**

**Grace For The Journey Series**

**March 8, 2015**

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When I was a student at the seminary I had a professor who often said that worship was like the big bass drum in a marching band. It is the bass drum, of course, that keeps the steady beat so the musicians are able to march in step as well as play their instruments together in the right rhythm. It is the bass drum that essentially holds the band and players together.

The same thing he said is true with worship. Worship is the thing that sets the beat and rhythm in our Christian lives. It is the place where we are reminded of God's love and purpose for us. It is that event where we hear God's word of forgiveness; share in his promises through word and sacraments; pray for ourselves and others; sing God's praises with joy.

It is like a bass drum in that we come to worship to be filled up with God's Spirit and power. Then during the week we often face the challenges of living our faith at home and work. We are tempted to do it our own way rather than God's way. We face ups and downs, discouragements, challenges. We face our busy schedules that often seem out of control.

Yet it is then that we stumble back to worship feeling drained ready to be filled up again. We hear again God's promises of how he is there to help us in our challenges. We are encouraged by being together with other believers. We are reassured of God's forgiveness and grace in the midst of our often bad choices and failings. We are re-ignited through worship so our daily service as a Christian during the week can make a difference. (Encouraged not to give up; reminded of truth).

Worship is a rhythm; a beat; a weekly ritual which keeps us marching in step with God our creator and with other believers. It enables us to play our instruments (our God given talents and spiritual gifts) in time and harmony with all the different instruments and talents in God's family. Worship is not an option for a Christian intent on living and growing their faith.

In fact, God himself planned this as part of his creation of the world. You remember I'm sure that God rested on the seventh day. After six days of creating the sun, planets, trees, lakes, animals, man and woman, God rested. He set aside that day and time for refreshment and renewal.

God is the one who established that weekly rhythm for worship and getting together as God's people. He designed it as part of his plan of creation; he did it so that people might keep their lives in balance. Therefore from that time on the rhythm of weekly worship was established. It is part of God's plan for you and me from the beginning.

When I went to college many years ago I decided like many other students that I would plan to sleep in on Sunday mornings and not go to worship. Humorously I would tell my friends that I had gone to Bedside Lutheran and had heard a sermon by Pastor Pillow.

Yet a few weeks of doing that was extremely awkward for me. Having attended worship most every Sunday during my growing up years it was as if something important was missing. Therefore after trying this for few weeks I recommitted myself to regular worship. With that weekly rhythm back in my life I had more balance; I was more conscious of God working in me on a daily basis. (Story of Mark)

My friends, we live in a time when most everyone complains about how their lives are out of control. A common cry is that we are too busy; we are stressed to the max. Yet we keep piling more activities on so we won't miss anything. In fact, increasing numbers of people even fill their Sundays with so many activities that they rarely have time to worship.

No wonder our lives are so out of balance; there is no steady rhythm or beat. God did his work in six days and then he took time for worship and rest. Worship is the last thing we should say we don't have time for. Regular worship helps to balance our priorities.

Worship empowers us to say "no" to certain things. It reminds us of the things that are really important. It gives us strength and purpose for today. Yes it may seem contrary to our regular thinking yet to worship regularly; to volunteer; to be involved in a church learning opportunity can actually help the rest of our life to feel more in perspective.

I mentioned last Sunday the popular saying of today, "You don't have to go to church to be a Christian." Yes in theory this is true. We are not saved or automatically made a Christian by simply going to church. Yet I also heard it said one time, "No, you don't need to go to church to be a Christian; yet you will need to go to remain a Christian."

The truth is if we believe in Jesus we aren't looking for an alibi or an easy way out. Believing in Jesus means that we want to worship him each week; we long to hear his Word and share in his Sacraments; we want to fellowship; to give and receive support from other believers. Worship is central to our Christian life and faith.

Yet that brings me to the focus of this sermon, "Grace For The Journey—Worship." The reason I believe many people are not worshipping regularly; the reason many have been turned off by the church is not only because they are too busy. It is oftentimes because our worship as churches has often been anything but glorious.

Our ALC church bishop when I was at seminary, Dr. David Preus, often talked about as he traveled all over the church how the worship was often done so poorly. He said the liturgy was often done like a funeral dirge; the hymns often had very little life with many of the hymn choices not worth singing; the sermons were many times very difficult to follow and often were not very well prepared. Dr. Preus would often say that if we really want to reach people for Jesus Christ we then need to do worship well.

This of course has always been one of my top goals here at Messiah. Granted, we haven't always succeeded; there are times when we really should have asked for forgiveness. Yes there have been times when my sermons haven't been very well prepared and have gone on too long; there are times when our music or song selections have fallen flat.

Our purpose and goal each week is to have glorious and meaningful worship. We want worship; the music, sermons, prayers, along with congregational participation all to be filled with the Holy Spirit and with power. This is accomplished, of course, when each worshipper is focused completely on God and love.

Messiah's mission is: "Seek-Connect-Impact...A Spiritual Journey Through A Jesus Filled Life;" this means we are compelled to have glorious worship which is welcoming to the seeker; has a message that is Jesus centered and relevant so it engages and empowers each one so they leave worship ready to impact their world.

Glorious worship should welcome and draw in those who are seeking for faith and support. Glorious worship has messages which speak to people's hearts and empowers them to live positively. Glorious worship ignites us in faith, service, and ministry to others. Glorious worship is part of our daily lives as much as our worship services.

Messiah is very blessed to have this wonderful sanctuary and space in which to worship and praise our awesome God. Those who were on the building committee 25 years ago need to be commended for how wonderful this space is for glorious worship.

God has also blessed Messiah with lots of people who have wonderful musical talents and gifts. Luverne and Bev provide wonderful music on the organ; the Messiah choir has had many faithful singers through the years and is a very important part of our songs of praise to our God.

Messiah has also been greatly blessed with the calling of Charis as our Youth & Worship Pastor; and with the Praise Band musicians who enhance our worship each week. It is so important in the church today to have blended and quality praise worship; it is essential if a church truly wants to reach out to the seeking and those who believe the church is stuck in the past.

God has also called our congregation to have worship which focuses on Jesus, on his Word of truth, on his life-transforming grace. To enhance these messages, as well as our whole worship experience, is the projection system you as a congregation donated nearly 4-years ago—this really adds to our glorious worship each week.

My friends, our call at Messiah is to keep improving our hearts and attitudes, along with finding even better ways of providing glorious worship each week. As Dr. Preus often said back when I was just a young pastor--if we really want to reach people we need to do everything we can to do our worship well. People are not drawn to unsingable hymns and liturgy that sounds like a funeral dirge—worship is to be alive, filled with God's Holy Spirit of joy, shining forth the light of his grace and love.

The bass drum is beating loudly in worship each week here at Messiah. My friends, let us follow God's rhythm and beat as we live our lives, and as we shine forth our talents and gifts together. Let us all pray and dedicate all of us, our whole selves, so that our worship together will be glorious; so it will impact and empower each person in faith and service.