

The Practices of Jesus: Worshipping Together

LaGrave Christian Reformed Church

February 2, 2020-AM Service

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Luke 4:14-16

This morning we continue our series on the practices of Jesus. We are looking at Jesus' practices with the goal of taking them on for ourselves and having them shape us into His likeness. Today we consider how Jesus practiced regular worship. There's lots of biblical evidence that Jesus went often to the synagogue. His parents took Him regularly. We know from early in Luke 4. Also, every one of each gospel writer's records shows Jesus going to the synagogue. There, He taught and healed and prayed and worshipped with those gathered. Our text is just a few verses from later in Luke 4 that affirm that truth.

So, obviously we have continued Jesus' practice of gathering for worship. Because here we are. Worshipping, praying, and learning together this morning. But why is this an important practice for us? Yes. Jesus did it-and so it's likely good for us too. But Jesus used those gatherings to get the message out about God's kingdom being at hand. And about how He, Himself was the long awaited Messiah. You and I already have the message. We already know the story. Can't I just worship God in my own way and on my own time? Wouldn't a solo, prayerful walk in the woods this morning be just as good for me? Why do I need to be here? The folks at Starbucks are just as nice and the view in the woods equally as beautiful. Plus, no one in those places will try to twist your arm about serving on committees or teaching Sunday School.

So, why do we do it? Why is it important we gather in this place together week after week? I offer three reasons: because we are forgetful, because we are family, and because we are forgiven.

First, God desires we worship together regularly, because we are forgetful people. Every day, you and I encounter narratives or stories that shape us. And through a bombardment of false messages, we begin to live-into those stories. Stories like this-you are self-made. If you work hard enough and smart enough-you can do anything or be anyone you want. If the trajectory of life is not moving upward-you must be doing something wrong. Remember-you are the center of your universe-and everyone will know it when you get that promotion, drive that new car, achieve that next level.

Or there's sort of the opposite false story-that you are not enough. That you are not smart enough or rich enough or charming enough or skinny enough or good enough to be an acceptable person. Or-an even more dangerous story-that you are not good enough or pious enough or faithful enough or holy enough to be loved or accepted by God.

You see, these false stories, they've been around forever. Way back in the Old Testament, God provided a way for His people to shed false stories about themselves. Stories like: you were made to be slaves, or like, your God has forgotten you.

What did God provide to combat these false stories? Well, the gift of worship. Gathering to worship together orients us to the truth-that we are God made, God led, and God loved. When we gather together for worship we recall again, how our life and breath is first of all pure gift, how all we are and all we have is because of God's gracious care, and how the hope we have in this hard world comes not from clawing our way up, but from God relentlessly and condescendingly moving toward us in love and in Jesus.

I like how Dietrich Bonhoeffer talks about this, in his book *Life Together*, which tells the story of a unique group of men sharing life together in an underground seminary during WWII, in the face of another horribly destructive false story. Bonhoeffer writes about morning worship together saying, "The early morning belongs to the church of the risen Christ. At the break of light, it remembers the morning on which death and sin lay prostrate in defeat and new life and salvation were given to mankind." He believed when we worship together, we give due praise to "God the Father and Creator who has preserved our life through the dark night and wakened us to a new day, [to] God the Son and Savior, who conquered death and hell for us and dwells in our midst as Victor, [and to] God the Holy Spirit, who pours the bright gleam of God's Word into our hearts at the dawn of the day, driving away all darkness...morning does not belong to the individual," says Bonhoeffer, "it belongs to the church of the triune God." Brothers and

Sisters, because we are forgetful-today we gather to hear again our true story-and God is as near as our breath-in our songs, in our prayers and in our simply being together.

Secondly, we worship together because we are family. We are on the journey of following Jesus together. That's the way God meant it to be. God called and blessed and made promises to a people, the people of Israel. And when Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them to pray – He began with, not, “my Father,” but “our Father.” “Our Father who art in heaven.” The Apostle Paul talks a lot about how we are heirs together of Jesus promises and about how together we make up the body of Christ. Being a follower of Jesus is a group activity. Not one of us is meant to walk the journey of life and faith alone. Which means that gathering here isn't only about meeting my individual need to worship. It is also about belonging to this family and ensuring others know they belong. It's about God giving gifts to each one of us that can bless and strengthen the family of God. Some of you know that I grew up in a large family. There were eight of us kids. So with our parents, there were ten of us around the table at mealtime. Before the family home was sold to someone else, we had the opportunity to gather one last time as siblings, along with my mom, around that large, memory-laden, time-tattered family dinner table. It was an evening of reminiscing, tears, and laughter. We cried about dad's empty chair. We laughed about how chaotic meal-times were and how rarely a meal went by without at least one roaring argument or tears because of a mean look or an under-table kick. We chuckled at how there was so often one lone child left at the table long after the meal was done, stubbornly refusing to finish whatever green was left on their plate. We agreed it was most often yours truly.

Here's my take away from that night. Love is stronger than our differences. Each one of us around that table are such unique and different people from each other. Though we are mix of loud and quiet, democrat and republican, urban and rural, something far more powerful holds us together. It's the bond of family love.

This is true, and even more so of the church. We belong to each other because we all belong to God. When we gather in worship, we celebrate that God has given us to each other. And even though it can be hard to be God's family together-with all our differences and the kicking under the table that happens in the church too, what it all boils down to is that we are an imperfect family, in an imperfect world, but held together by undeserved grace and by a bond of love so strong that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it.

Brothers and sisters, we gather in worship because it's easy to forget our true story. We gather because we are family. And finally, we gather because we are forgiven.

Week to week in this place we celebrate the forgiveness of all our sins because of what Christ has done for us on the cross. By His wounds we are healed. It's the center of our life together. It's our hope and joy. And it is also our calling to demonstrate to the world around us, what a true community of God's forgiven people looks like.

Last week, LaGrave had the privilege of hearing from some Calvin University students who live not far from here, but who all started their university careers while they were incarcerated. They have remarkable stories to tell as individuals, and about the difference Calvin University and Seminary are making in Handlon prison.

I was particularly moved as the men talked about how they experienced the early conversations with the Calvin representatives while they were in prison. It was stunning to them that they were being addressed as human beings. It shook them to the core that suddenly, they were more than a number. They were people, people worthy of love and attention and an education. And that's the truth. That's the true story we celebrate and proclaim. God's worshipping family knows that the ground is level at the foot of the cross. Not one of us stands above the other. Beneath the cross of Jesus, we all look up to see our Savior. And then we look around and see our family, a family of broken but forgiven, beloved children of God.

So, let's not stop meeting together to remember our true story, and too together, as a family, worship: Father, Son and Holy Spirit!
Thanks be to God!

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