

October 7, 2018
St. Nicholas'

Way of Love: Worship
Gather in community weekly to thank, praise, and dwell with God

Acts 2:14a, 36-41
Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17
1 Peter 1:17-23
Luke 24:13-35

Today, we talk about Worship - the fourth practice of the Way of Love.

One of the earliest lessons I learned when I was first ordained and I would see parishioners out and about during the week, was to never, ever say "see you Sunday" as we were saying goodbye. Invariably, even from the "regular" attenders, I'd get the deer in the headlight look and a stammering, non-committal answer along the lines of "sure, uh, see you...um ... later...". It's as if they didn't want to tell me if they had other plans or lock themselves into anything for Sunday morning - because if you tell the priest you will be there and don't show up ... well, who knows what forms of lightning bolt themed punishment you might have to face.

Just kidding - God has never, that I'm aware of, struck anyone down by a bolt of lightning. Brimstone, sulfur, and hail, yes, but lightning, no.

These were the strangest and most awkward situations, so I just learned to say bye and see y'all later.

What is your definition of "regular" church attendance? For a lot of folks nowadays is it once or twice a month. There are as many reasons for this as there are people who have the choice to be here or not on any given Sunday. People travel more than they used to, children's sports often take place on Sunday mornings, college and professional sports games take precedence over church, staying out too late on Saturday makes it difficult to get up on time ... the list could go on and on. But it all comes down to attending church every Sunday has become optional.

God commanded the Israelites to observe the Sabbath as a day of rest but there was no specific day for worship because all days, their entire lives were to be structured around the worship of God. Jesus and his disciples observed the Sabbath, even if he interpreted "work" a bit differently than the Pharisees did and they spent lots of time in the synagogue but never specifically referenced the first day of the week.

So how did Sunday worship begin?

Early in the 2nd century, St. Ignatius of Antioch said, "let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's Day as a festival, the resurrection-day, the queen and chief of all the days." But it seems that Sunday as the Christian day of worship began with the first Apostles. In Acts 20:7, Luke says they gathered together on the first day of the week to break bread. In his first letter to the church in Corinth, Paul also references gathering on the first day of the week.

We know it was on the first day of the week that Jesus rose from the dead, a day to begin God's new creation in Christ, and so it seems only natural that Jesus' first followers would gather on this day to

remember his resurrection. As Christians we claim Sunday as the “Lord’s Day”, a day to gather with other believers to break bread together as Jesus instructed us so that as we remember what he did for us, we are re-membered as his body, the the newly created church.

But Jesus’ act of breaking bread was so much more than to just give us something to do in our worship service every week. It is a microcosm of the way we are to live every moment of our lives.

On the night he was arrested, Jesus was eating supper with his closest friends and yet he also knew that before the next 24 hours were over, two of them would betray him outright and 9 of the remaining ten would leave him to face death alone. Jesus didn’t offer them the bread and the wine because he expected anything in return, he did it because he loved them unconditionally, even knowing what he knew.

In our gospel reading today, the disciples are still grieving what they believe to be the death of Jesus. They had heard rumors he was alive but they hadn’t seen him and so they are returning home, wondering what it is they had just witnessed and what was their next step.

And this man comes along side them and asks them what are they discussing. Jesus wants to help them learn to articulate who they are as his followers. They don’t yet know and so he tells them their story, he retells them God’s story they had probably heard their whole lives as they went to the synagogue and temple. And in the telling of this story, their hearts are moved but they still can’t grasp what it is all about. They invite him to stay with them, they offer this “stranger” the gift of unconditional hospitality because they know this is the right thing to do. And then in the meal they share with him, they are re-membered as they remember Jesus. They get it.

This is why Jesus tells us to do this thing, to remember him whenever we break bread with others. Eating is our most common connection as humans beings, next to breathing, of course. We all need to do it and we all do it every day. Jesus wants what he teaches to be just as common and normal to us as eating.

This meal we do every Sunday is a symbol for each and every encounter we have with our fellow human beings. With every encounter we have the choice to be hospitable or not, and when we choose to be hospitable, we remember Jesus and he is revealed both to us and to the person we show his love to.

God knows that we are inundated with false messages of who and what we should be according to the world’s standards - that we should have a certain house, a certain car, wear certain clothes and shoes, that we should be out for only ourselves, that to hate and belittle others is acceptable, that nothing else but what I want matters, and in this tidal wave of false identities, we need to be reminded who and whose we are in the regular, weekly rhythm of our life.

We come together week after week to remember together who we are - people whose God shaped space in our very core is being filled and nurtured by the presence of God in what we take into our bodies through the bread and the wine. We are a people who have turned toward Christ, knowing that together we are the body of Christ and the bond between us is strengthened through our corporate worship. We are a people who know that we have to continuously learn of the God who created us and loves us unconditionally because disciples don’t just learn about but learn to be like our teacher. We are a people who pray so that we can know God better. And we are to be a people of worship.

Coming together to worship God regularly, weekly, is to be as much a part of our life as eating and breathing the breath God gives us. The earliest Christians knew how important it is for us to come together as often as possible. The people of God who formed and shaped our worship through the centuries understood how God uses this time to shape us as we focus on the one who created all things.

“When we worship, we gather with others before God. We hear the Good News of Jesus Christ, give thanks, confess, and offer the brokenness of the world to God. As we break bread, our eyes are opened to the presence of Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are made one body, the body of Christ sent forth to live the Way of Love.” Amen.

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/explore-way-love>