

**08.25.24 ~ Pentecost 14**  
**“How and Why We Worship”**  
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

**Psalm 98** <sup>NRSVUE</sup>

*Praise the Judge of the World. A Psalm.*

<sup>1</sup> O sing to the Lord a new song,  
for he has done marvelous things.

His right hand and his holy arm  
have gotten him victory.

<sup>2</sup> The Lord has made known his victory;  
he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.

<sup>3</sup> He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness  
to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen  
the victory of our God.

<sup>4</sup> Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;  
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

<sup>5</sup> Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre,  
with the lyre and the sound of melody.

<sup>6</sup> With trumpets and the sound of the horn  
make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord.

<sup>7</sup> Let the sea roar and all that fills it,  
the world and those who live in it.

<sup>8</sup> Let the floods clap their hands;  
let the hills sing together for joy

<sup>9</sup> at the presence of the Lord, for he is coming  
to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness  
and the peoples with equity.

**Leader: These are Words of Worship from God.**

**All: Thanks be to God!**

**John 4:21-24** <sup>TLB</sup>

<sup>21-24</sup> Jesus replied, “The time is coming, ma’am, when we will no longer be concerned about whether to worship the Father here or in Jerusalem. For it’s not *where* we worship that counts, but *how* we worship—is our worship spiritual and real? Do we have the Holy Spirit’s help? For God is Spirit, and we must have his help to worship as we should. The Father wants this kind of worship from us. But you Samaritans know so little about him, worshiping blindly, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes to the world through the Jews.”

**Leader: These are Christ’s Words of Truth about Himself!**

**All: Thanks be to God!**

**Please pray with me:**

Dear Lord, our creator, healer, guide, leader, and strength, we thank you for this morning's study and worship together. We offer thanks for the many blessings of the week, even if illness invades our schedules. Help us to remember that it is through you that we find healing and peace. Through you and your love, we find salvation, truth, and comfort. Through our worship, we draw closer to you; through our prayer, you hear our needs, and through your inspired Scripture, we hear your voice and direction. Please renew us and refuel us for the coming week. Instruct us as we explore the Scriptures now and inspire us Lord as you fill us with your spirit, in Jesus' name. Amen.

This week, I want to thank our Worship Team, Music staff, and you, the congregation, for helping to produce a terrific Hymn Sing and time of worship! Didn't you learn a lot? I certainly did, and the information David shared made the hymns more meaningful to me. I do hope you found it insightful. You chose wonderful stand-by's and some we didn't get to last week, we're singing today! I welcome your feedback and creativity as we continue to PAUSE and explore ways to enhance the worship experience through diverse worship elements and styles.

Today is the beginning of a short series of Worship teachings, just a few weeks. We often think we know all there is to know about worship just by coming to church on Sundays, but in Seminary, I discovered that wasn't true. There are Biblical, theological, evangelical, Christological, and eschatological purposes to the way Baptists worship, so we'll start with some basics, and move a little deeper next week. Next time you're out of town, I encourage you to visit a different denomination for Sunday worship; it is enlightening! For my worship course, we had to visit three other churches, with at least two different denominations. Then summarize what we noticed, observed, and experienced in a paper utilizing some of our course lessons and new knowledge. It was very helpful.

There are many ways to approach this broad subject. First, let's define worship: "1. reverent honor and homage paid to God or a sacred personage, or to any object regarded as sacred; 2. formal or ceremonious rendering of such honor and homage; 3. adoring reverence or regard; or 4. the object of adoring reverence or regard [www.dictionary.com]." This refers to both "worship" as a noun which is what we're doing this morning, and to the verb form, to revere. In the Bible, the word, *εκκλησια*, (*ecclesia*) was used mainly for groups of people, regardless of where they were meeting. Just as we use the word "church" today, it was used to signify the assembling of the people of Israel in both Hebrew and Greek Scriptures; *εκκλησια* still carries this primary meaning of an assembly of the people themselves, not the building they meet in. We, on the other hand, forget the difference, and use "church" as both the building and the body of believers! *Ecclesia* is where the word ecclesiology comes from to describe general matters pertaining to the church; and as Baptists, ecclesiology means how the church relates to one another as a **congregation**.

If I were to ask you why we worship, you would probably say it is because we are instructed to in Scripture. And that is true; throughout history, humans have worshipped God, gods, or things. During Moses' journey from Egypt to Israel, the people hedged their bets and worshipped in multiple ways, some of which were not pleasing to God, like their idol-worship. Most of the psalms direct the reader to sing, dance, praise, or pray to the Lord our God. Jesus himself taught God's word in the Jewish temples but eventually overturned the typical temple worship patterns and commerce. And in many of the Apostle Paul's

letters, he corrected the churches he started to be sure they kept Christ at the center of their worship.

Although there are many elements of the worship service, let us think about four key values that should be present in any worship setting. They contribute to the why we worship and are outlined by Christopher J. Ellis in his textbook, *Gathering*: 1. Attention to Scripture is the foundation of our faith, hope, and practices; 2. Devotion and openness to the Spirit helps us apply the Scriptures to daily life and to sense the presence of God in the service; 3. Concern for the community of the Church fulfills the pastoral dimension through joint Bible study and meeting together; and 4. A focus on eschatology fulfills the missionary or evangelistic purpose, yielding hope and encouragement for the people. The bottom line for us is what Jesus said in Matthew 18:20: “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” Jesus truly assembles us here (one of our first callings), is present with us (through every element and participant), refuels and centers our distracted spiritual focus, and then sends us out to share the Gospel and testimonies of salvation. Those are more of the how’s and why’s we worship!

The very first line in our Psalm 98 says: “<sup>1</sup> O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things.” The writer invites his readers to sing to the Lord a new song because of his wonderful love, faithfulness, deliverance, and salvation. The psalmist calls his hearers or today’s readers to shout for joy and sing with various musical instruments. Even all of nature, the earth’s rivers, seas, and mountains are called to resound and rejoice in community! He made all things beautiful, isn’t that what we sing on Sundays?

In the John 4 passage, Jesus had left Judea in the south of Israel to avoid a conflict there and was traveling North toward Galilee. He had a choice, but the shortest walking route was through Samaria, a region in the middle of Palestine; Samaria was multiracial with intercultural religions as well. You know this story: he sat down by Jacob's well at Sychar around 6 pm when most women were already gone. They got their water earlier in the day for daily chores, to catch up on local gossip, and because it was cooler then. There was one woman there, and Jesus asked her for water because he did not have a cup or bucket to draw from the well. Custom dictated that Jesus, a Jew, should **not** associate with a sinful Samaritan woman. After he tells of her numerous "husbands" who were not really married to her, and offers her living water through himself, she believes he must be a prophet of God. She wants to repent but has worship concerns: where, how, if. Jesus turns to her and explains that he is this living water, so she is to worship him in spirit and truth, to worship the very character of God and in union with both Father and Son, not on a specific altar or location, but in her heart and state of mind. That is good news for us too. Worship happens any place we are one with the Father; Jesus refers in this passage to the transformation she is about to experience. Is our worship transformative?

As we explore and learn more about this topic of worship, we must think about our own reasons and worship practices. Some church services are intentionally more like a concert or a show; other churches use more symbols and rituals, depending on the denomination. It has been a joy over the past five plus years to add to, subtract from, re-evaluate, and collaborate with our music team to create worship experiences and

sermons that evolve, stimulate, challenge, teach, comfort, and build community. We are still working on our practices to bring fresh approaches to sharing the Gospel, a practical relevance, attractional elements, appropriate ritual, new-to-us music, community participation, some nostalgia occasionally, but mostly a new legacy that helps to build our church intergenerationally. Will you keep an open mind and a heart of prayer as we do so? Thank you, and Amen! ||

**Let us pray.** Dear Lord, we thank you today for these reminders that our comfortable worship may not be as transformative to others as we think or assume it is. May we have the courage to step up to explore God's leadings in this area of worship with patience and grace. Guide our thoughts and creativity to draw others and ourselves closer to you as we meet in community together. Help us for the rest of this year and always to find beauty in our worship, so that we share your love with others. May your Spirit empower us to be your disciples, and to lead others to you. Jesus, it is in your name we pray, **Amen.**