

Title: "3D Worship"
Text: I Peter 2:4-12

We are continuing in our series of sermons on "Living Faith in 3D,"
-and today I'd like to turn our sights on worship.

On this "Thanksgiving Sunday" the question is: how do you say thanks to God?
-My friends, that is essentially what worship is: responding to the goodness and love of God by saying "thanks."

In a few minutes, prior to sharing communion together, we will have the opportunity to share our thanksgivings.
-As a nation we set aside Thanksgiving Day once a year to do this in a formal way.
-But as Christians, we gather to say thanks to God every Sunday,
-and informally we get to do it every day on our own.

Worship is a way of life for us.
-Responding to the love of God by loving Him back and saying "thank You."
-So let's think for a minute today about worship, and how we say thanks.

Turn with me to First Peter 2:4-12.
-Last week we saw from the Book of Acts how God had opened the Apostle Peter up to a whole new dimension of how wide and long and high and deep the love of Christ is.
-Listen now to what that same Apostle Peter would later write to other Christians about "declaring God's praises."

My friends, did you know that you are a chosen people?
-a royal priesthood?
That is who you are now if you have received the love of God through Jesus Christ.

Did you know that you are a people belonging to God?
-a holy nation?
-This is who you have become if you have experienced how wide and long and high and deep the love of God is.

And Peter says that our response to what God has done in us,
-is to declare the praises of Him who called us out of
darkness into his wonderful light.

Declaring God's praises. That is worship.

-And that is what we Christians gather to do each Sunday.
-We gather to respond to God's great love for us by loving
him back, declaring his praises, saying "Thanks."

The church gathered is a beautiful thing.

-And gathering to give thanks and worship together each week
does number of things to restore our souls.

1. First, it reminds us of who we are.

As Peter describes us here: we are a royal priesthood,
a holy nation, a people belonging to God.

Gathered worship is a place to be "restored" in the sense that
we become secure again in that identity.

-We are reminded of who we are, who God has now made
us to be in Christ.

2. And secondly, gathered worship is a place to be reminded
of God's great gospel story, in which we have been
included.

All week long we hear competing stories focused on striving,
performing, competing, ambition, worry.

-But gathered worship gives us an opportunity to refocus on
the story of God:

-the God of self-sacrifice, who has died for us,

-the God who calls us to rest and trust and hope in Him,
-and not in ourselves;

-the God who is in the process of restoring and redeeming
and re-creating broken people in this broken world.

Gathering each week to read Scripture, and pray, and sing,
and hear the gospel, and share communion,

-it allows us to relocate ourselves and our lives in the bigger
story of God's redemption.

3. And then thirdly, gathered worship creates space and time in our lives to be refreshed by the empowering Spirit of God.

Where two or more are gathered in Jesus' name, He is there among us by His Spirit.

-And the Spirit of God is here right now among us, ministering to each one of us in just the way we need.

How many of you have woken up on a Sunday morning not feeling like going to worship at all?

-You're tired and grumpy, and you want to just sleep in or get another cup of coffee and have everyone leave you alone.

-But somehow or other you get yourself to church anyway, and somehow or other when you leave this place, -you are feeling better than when you got here.

Somehow your soul got restored. Your spirit got refreshed.

-Your body feels a little more energetic.

-You feel like maybe the week to come might not be as bad as you thought it might earlier in the morning.

You see, gathering with the rest of the God's people for corporate worship creates space for us to be refreshed by God's empowering Spirit.

Yet having described these ways in which worship restores our souls,

-I want to take us back to the simple heart of worship:

-Saying thanks to God for all he has done for us and declaring God's praises.

Peter says here, that as God's chosen people we now declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness and into His wonderful light.

You may have never thought about it like this, but when we declare God's praises back to God it is called "worship."

And when we declare God's praises to each other in testimonies of thanksgiving,

-it is called "edification."

And when we declare God's praises to the wider world, it is called evangelism and mission.

Do you see how three dimensional that is?
-It is "upward and inward and outward."

And my friends, all three dimensions of declaring God's praises are part of what we do as we gather on Sunday mornings;
-and all three dimensions are part of the way we are to live our lives every day as the scattered church in the world.

Let's look at this for a minute.

When we gather together for worship, the "upward dimension" is naturally our primary purpose.
-Our focus is on God.
-We are here to "declare His praises,"
-and our call to worship, our songs and hymns, our prayers of praise and adoration are all directed upward to God.

That's our first priority: to be God's people declaring God's praises back to God,
-and responding to His amazing love by loving Him back.

But God is multi-dimensional, and we humans are multi-dimensional, and guess what? Worship is multi-dimensional.

When we gather to worship God as His people,
-we find that we are not only singing and praying to God,
-but we are singing and praying to each other as well.

When you are all singing, your voices are edifying me.
-You are singing to God, but I am also getting blessed.
-And you are getting blessed simply by being in the midst of a bunch of other people singing.
-The worship of God envelopes us, and whether we know it or not, we are being uplifted by it.

And people who come to worship who are not yet believers

themselves, they are uplifted by it.

- They are getting edified, and they are being evangelized just by being in the midst of people worshipping God.

And so even as we are declaring God's praises upwardly to God, there are inward and outward dynamics that are happening at the same time.

But then there are also parts of our worship service that are more intentionally inward.

- There's the musical meditation at the beginning of worship where we more intentionally prepare our own hearts for worship,

- and there are times of silence, and of prayer,

- time during communion for silent reflection.

- There is also the sermon, which is intentionally a time of teaching and preaching.

- The sermon isn't directed at God, but at all of us.

- It is addressing our mind and heart and even our emotions, our whole soul.

These parts of our worship service are much more intentionally directed "inward."

- But they too are multi-dimensional.

- In silence and prayer and preaching, God and His Word are still the focus,

- and because God is present by His Spirit, God uses those times of silence and prayer and preaching to connect with us inwardly.

- The upward and the inward are intimately integrated.

But the outward is also happening at the same time.

- All through worship we are conscious that we are part of a community of others.

- We are praying with others, and for others.

- We are listening to God's word with others, and we are learning from someone, the pastor or preacher that day.

In fact, someone else in the church has picked the songs and hymns we are singing.

- Someone else is up front leading the prayer time.

- Someone else is preaching to us.

You see, worship is not just an upward and inward event.
-It is not just “you and God” communing together.
-It is always upward and inward and also outward, in that we are connected in worship to all these other people.

And parts of the worship service are quite intentionally outward.

- The pastoral prayer time is quite intentionally focused on intercessory prayer.
- That means we are praying on behalf of others.
 - Some of those others are people at worship who are in need.
 - Some of those prayers are for people outside the congregation, or for people in other parts of the world.
 - Some of those prayers are evangelistic, praying for others to come to know the love of God.
 - Some are prayers of compassion for those in the world who have experienced tragedy or trauma.

That is a definite “outward focus” in our worship service,
-but you see, those prayers too are also directed upward to God, and they are often edifying inwardly to those of us who hear those prayers and join in them.

Our gathered worship, you see, is 3D.

- It is upward and inward and outward all the time.
- We are declaring God’s praises back to God, and to each other, and to the world.

And then we go forth after worship to be the church scattered in the world.

- We go back to our homes, then back to our workplaces or schools,
 - or the myriad of places and people we will connect with all week long.

-And guess what? We get to actually do the same thing that we practiced on Sunday everywhere we go.

As God’s chosen people, as His holy nation, as His royal priesthood,

- we get to declare God’s praises back to God in all kinds of ways all week long.

- We can pray to God anytime and anywhere.
- We can sing to Him in the car on the way to work.
- We can shoot up little prayers for help, or prayers of thanksgiving as we head off to the next thing we have to do.

And we can declare God's praises inwardly to ourselves,

- as we read God's word and pray during the week,
- or as we remind ourselves throughout the day of God's promises to us,
- or as we receive God's forgiveness for ways we may have slipped up in our relationship with Him or with others.

-Reminding ourselves of the good news of our salvation is a way we have of inwardly declaring God's praises every day.

And then we get to declare God's praises to others around us as we share words of encouragement with friends and family,

- or call a friend to tell them something neat that God did in our lives that day.
- Or as we listen to a friend or family member who needs a listening ear.
- Just being there for others at times is edifying to them.

Or we can also at times share the gospel with people who have not yet come to believe it.

You see, declaring God's praises is a multi-dimensional way of life.

- It is simply what God's chosen people do.
- Those who have experienced how wide and long and high and deep the love of Christ is,
- simply find themselves responding to it by giving thanks to God, and by opening their lives to Him even more,
- and by sharing the good news with others.

-It all brings praise to God. It's a 3D life of worship.

So in light of all of that, let's take some time to declare God's praises and give Him thanks and praise together.