

Worshipping What? John 4:7-26

I always enjoy the Lenten services. Each week we are given a glimpse into the various methods of how other congregations worship God. While our doctrines and traditional styles are the major distinctions, there are also many similarities. Think for a moment about what happened in your worship service this morning. When (if) you said the Lord's Prayer did you say debtors, trespasses, or sins? Did you sing the old style hymns or the contemporary songs projected on a screen? Although our traditions may be different, I think it is safe to say that in the end we are all praising the same God. Therefore, I pose this question before you: What made the service this morning worship?

I ask this question to probe your heart, mind, and soul in helping you define the meaning of worship. What is it that draws you back each week to your church? Here are some of the most common answers to this question:

- * The opportunity to praise and give thanks to God
- * The special music and songs
- * Listening to scripture
- * Listening to the pastor's sermon
- * Communion (even with the Styrofoam wafers)
- * Socializing with my church family
- * Worship becomes so much a part of my life that my week isn't the same if I miss church.

So let me ask you another question, “What part of worship changed your life today?” In other words, what happened in worship that you can’t wait to share with the rest of the world? Not easy questions to answer, are they? As a pastor (I hope my colleagues would agree) I would rather see how worship affected your life and your commitment to God than to simply hear, “Good message, Pastor” at the end of the service. While these words are comforting, there is more to worship.

Our passage tonight shows how one conversation about worship changed a woman’s life. The quick overview of this story brings our attention to how this sinful woman was saved and was given the living water of God’s grace. As we separate the various parts of the story, our attention is drawn to a sudden shift in the conversation. Jesus has been explaining how with one sip from this living water your thirst will be quenched forever. According to John, as Jesus was inviting her to fetch her husband, she suddenly shifts the conversation to a different controversial topic; worship. Her intention was to remind this Jewish Prophet that *he* was in Samaria not Judea and *his ways of worship* were not conducive to the Samaritan worship. She was ready to point out his indiscretions as a Jew in Samaria. The Samaritan worship consisted of a strange mixture of pagan worship and fearing God. They walked to the

mountain top to worship God because this is where Moses went to be close to God. They believed only in the Pentateuch, the first 5 bibles of the Old Bible written by Moses. They worshiped as Moses did; high on the mountains.

The Jewish worship focused on obedience to God's laws as taught and interpreted by the prophets in the Old Testament. They also feared God's rath; therefore to keep God happy they brought offerings and sacrifices to the Temple in hopes of restoring their relation with God. The Jews believed that God lived in the Holy of Holies in the Temple; therefore this was the only place to worship God. However, through the course of this conversation, Jesus brought a third perspective to worship. Instead of arguing over where to worship, Jesus instructs that **what** they worship contained greater meaning to God. Jesus said, "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." Worship is about God; not traditions, laws, Temples or mountain tops.

Spiritual worship encompasses our entire being. What we bring to God in our worship is our heart, mind, and soul along with our bodies, voices, and money. Worshiping God in spirit and truth means we have witnessed firsthand Christ's presence in our lives. The condition of our spirit is vital for true worship. Although it is not the only means through

which God can communicate with us, the spirit is the most direct line to God. It was God's Spirit that came to the world when Jesus was baptized. I believe this is the same spirit that lives within us guiding our decisions and helping us define the moral values by which we choose to live. It is also our spirit that opens our hearts, minds and souls to seeing God.

Throughout history, the appearance of God is anticipated. The people of Jesus' time waited for the Messiah to come. Now the Messiah has arrived and they struggle to see him as God's Son. This story continues with Jesus removing his human disguise to expose his divinity as the Messiah. When the Samaritan woman realizes that this is truly the Messiah, she cannot wait to tell the world she has seen Christ face to face. She doesn't ask them to trust her words she invites them to come and see for themselves.

We also come to worship to see Christ face to face. This is not always a pleasant experience if we bring our true selves before God and our week's activities with us. In addition to a time of praise and thanksgiving for all God has given us, worship is also a time to confess the acts of our lives that we are not proud to claim. When we come to worship in spirit and truth we come baring our entire being, heart, mind, and soul to God. Through the sincerity of our hearts, we open the door for God to

enter changing our lives forever. The Samaritan woman did not deny the truth when Jesus addressed her current living situation. Jesus already knew what had happened. The same is true for us. God already knows what we have done since our last worship encounter. Instead of leaving that at home, God invites us to bring this with us to worship as either a praise or confession. We come to our Holy place to stand before God, seeing Christ for who Christ really is; that is worship. Through songs, prayers, preaching, etc. we look for Christ's face

The rest of the story demonstrates how we are to invite others to worship. According to John, the Samaritan woman's life had changed as a result of this brief conversation with Jesus. She left her water jug and immediately went back into the city to share her experience with the town people. These were the same people she had earlier avoided by coming to the well at noon. These were neither her friends nor really even acquaintances, but she couldn't wait to tell the world she had seen the Messiah. This brings me back to my original question, "What part of worship changed your life today?" It is time we spread the news, Christ is alive! Amen.