

“...With all your heart”
Focus on Worship
Psalm 84, Luke 7:36-47
January 17, 2010

What comes to your mind when I say this: PDA? If you've been a member of one of the mission teams we've sent to New Orleans, PDA means Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. [Haiti] For the technologically-astute among us, PDA means Personal Digital Assistant, like a Palm Pilot, Blackberry, etc. The first time I ever heard of a PDA, I was in high school. I had a boyfriend who went to the Naval Academy and when I went to visit him at the end of his plebe summer, I learned that PDAs were a no-no. PDA = Public Display of Affection. There was to be no kissing, hugging, or even hand-holding in public. No PDAs. No public displays of affection were allowed. I want to speak with you today about a *different* kind of PDA, one that is acceptable and even desirable. But one we are a bit reluctant to embrace.

We have started off this new year focusing on the primary purpose of life: WORSHIP. Bringing enjoyment to God, living for His pleasure is the first purpose of your life. Bringing pleasure to God is called 'worship.' One basic definition of worship is this: Worship is expressing our love to God for who He is, what He's said, and what He's done.¹ We express our love to God *in response* to God, who has already expressed *His love* to us: in response to who God is, what He's said—His promises, His instruction—and what He's done, for us, for others, for the world. Worship is *always* a response: our response to God. Worship is responding to ALL that God is with ALL that we are. And ALL is a crucial part of that description of worship.

Jesus said it this way when He identified the most important commandment of all the 613 commandments in the Jewish Law: “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” [Mark 12:30] We call that the Great Commandment. The Message: “Love the Lord God with all your passion, prayer, intelligence, and energy.” Today, the focus of our message on worship is loving God with all your HEART. All your passion. Psalm 84:1-2: “How lovely is Your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.” Can you hear the passion in the writer's voice? The yearning, the longing to be in the “courts of the LORD,” the Temple, the place of God's very presence. His whole being *longing* just to be with God. His heart and flesh crying out, shouting joyfully to God who is alive and living and present there. This is more than just, “Well, it's Sunday, I guess I really ought to go to church.” “I faint with longing to enter the courts of the LORD.” (NLT)

Have you ever felt so desperate to get to church, to enter into worship that you thought you might just faint dead away? You know, if we're honest, most of us don't approach worship that expectantly, with that depth of feeling, that desperately even. In fact, it seems a bit much to us, if we're honest. A bit over-the-top. A bit too, well, *emotional*. Really: *fainting* to go to church? Well, you might say, we Presbyterians are just not that demonstrative. We're more reserved. But there is no doubt that “...the Scriptures call us to *expressive* worship—both vocally and physically expressed...”² The Scripture often tells us to “Shout for joy to the Lord.” Shout. Not

¹ Definition of worship by Saddleback Church as noted in *The Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren.

² Jack Hayford. *Manifest Presence*, 70.

just whisper. Not just mumble. *Shout*. Joyfully. Shouting is usually pretty passionate. E-A-G-L-E-S: *Eagles!*

You know, Pastor Doug talked about this last week. The passion with which we approach the “worship” of our favorite sports teams. And yet, when it comes to God, we’re so reserved. In fact, we often think that passionate expressions of love for God or desire for God are inappropriate in public worship. Too emotional. Some find it embarrassing to even think about expressing their love and devotion for God in any public way, or are embarrassed to see others do so. No place for PDAs in church. It’s too embarrassing. Now, I’m not saying that our worship should be entirely emotional, entirely based only upon our feelings. But frankly, few of us are in any danger of that happening.

Now, I know that Jesus also said to love God “with all your *mind*.” And we’re going to talk about that in a couple weeks. He also said that God was looking for those who would worship Him “in spirit and in truth.” And we’re pretty good at the “mind” and “truth” part of worship, the more intellectual part. In fact, I know that for many of you, the most important part of worship is the sermon, when we teach from the truth of Scripture. I watch many weeks as folks come in late to worship, sometimes just in time for the sermon. It’s almost as if the singing and sharing and praying that come before the sermon aren’t important. As if the hymns and prayers that come before the reading and proclaiming of the Word of God are just introductory fluff. “I don’t need all that stuff. Just give me a good message.” Some people don’t like services where there is no sermon, services where we just sing and pray and hear the Scriptures. To them, it’s the sermon—the teaching, the part of worship that appeals to their intellect—that is the most important.

Now, please don’t misunderstand me. I’m a preacher. I’m very thankful for folks who think the sermon is important. And it is. However, the Bible calls us to love God with all our heart and soul, before the mind is mentioned. Jesus said that God was seeking those who would worship Him “in *spirit* and in truth;” spirit comes first. My spirit is my heart and soul, my inner being, emotions and will. See, God wants not only your intellect, but your devotion, your *love*. I would contend that the Bible suggests that the worship God desires most is not primarily intellectual—though it is certainly intelligent.³

One writer says it this way: “what is on God’s mind when we worship Him is not how many grandiose thoughts we have about Him, but how passionately our hearts desire Him...”⁴ The Greatest Commandment, after all, is that we *love* God, not that we *obey* God, or *fear* God or even *praise* God, though certainly we are called and commanded to do all these things. But first the Scripture commands us to *delight in* God. To *love God with all*.

Another writer describes worship this way: “Worship is our response to the overtures of love from the heart of the Father.”⁵ I promise you: when someone makes “overtures of love” to you—tells you they love you, shows their love in meaningful ways to you—they are not looking for a purely intellectual response. When I tell Paul that I love him, or demonstrate that by fixing

³ Hayford, 67.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 158.

his breakfast or making his lunch, I am not looking for this kind of response from him: “Well, I know you love me, I am, after all, your husband and it just makes sense that you would love me. This oatmeal is very good for me, so thanks for making it.”

God has made amazing “overtures of love” to us in sending Jesus to offer us a life of joy and peace, forgiveness and power and purpose. And He desires that we love Him in return, and express that love.

You know, I heard another Bible teacher say this and it is very profound to me. When I tell Paul that I love him, I don’t do it just so that he’ll say it back to me. But I love it when he does. When I tell our granddaughter, Kayleigh, that I love her, she says it back: “Love you, too, Grandma.” When we worship, when we express our love to God, it’s never just me saying to God, “I love you, Lord.” I am always responding to God’s love for me. In the cross, God has already said to me: “I love you.” What He wants to hear from me is, “I love you, too, Lord.”

When I was thinking about this series of messages on worship last fall, one account from the gospels came immediately to mind. Now, it is not, strictly speaking, about worship, in the sense of worship in the Temple or synagogue or church. But it is an example of one woman’s passionate expression of her love for Jesus. It is found in one form or another in all four gospels. Today we’re going to hear the account from Luke’s gospel. [Luke 7:36-47](#).

What strikes me about this passage is the extravagant and shameless way in which this woman publicly expresses her love and devotion to Jesus. It is generally assumed that she was a prostitute. She had, no doubt, heard Jesus teach. Heard him speak of the possibility of forgiveness and His offer of a fresh start for even the most despicable of sinners. Even for her. “Could it be,” she must have wondered, “that even after my life of shameless sin I can be truly forgiven and start over? Is it really true that even my life can be washed clean?” She was overcome with the wonder of it. And so she stands behind him, weeping. Life was much more public in those days than it is now. It would not have been unusual for people to have wandered in and out of Simon’s dinner party with the famous young teacher from Nazareth in attendance. But it was totally inappropriate for her to touch him. Men and women did not touch each other in public, even if they were married to each other. No PDAs allowed. And it was *especially* shocking that she would let down her hair. In traditional Middle Eastern society, women are required to keep their hair covered in public, because a woman’s hair is considered sexually provocative. This woman knew the rules. She knew that what she was doing was totally out of bounds in polite society.

But she loved Jesus for the promise of forgiveness He had offered to her, and she didn’t care who knew it. She didn’t care what they thought about her emotional display of affection. She had to know that her actions would be deemed inappropriate and unseemly but she couldn’t help herself and didn’t try. She just could not help responding to what Jesus had said to her and done for her. Her love for Jesus was extravagant and shameless. The perfume she pours out on His feet was extravagantly expensive. The love she pours out on Him was shamelessly emotional and public. Perhaps one of the most moving PDAs in all history. Her recognition of and repentance from her shameless sin led to a response of shameless and public expressions of love and devotion and worship.

Worship is always a response. And it is meant to be a response of *love*, passionately expressed, extravagantly expressed. Publicly expressed. You know, we are not ashamed to express our love for the Eagles or the Phillies or the Blue Hens passionately and publicly. We sing, we shout, we jump up and down and wave our arms and proudly wear our team colors. Why are we so reluctant and almost embarrassed to express our love for God, passionately, publicly, extravagantly, with great emotion and affection? Could it be that we do not know, or somehow have forgotten, how extravagantly God has loved us? How shamelessly and publicly Jesus showed His love for us by being willing to suffer and die so that we might have life—abundant, joy-filled, extravagant life? The cross is the most powerful PDA of all time.

Listen to this statement from Richard Foster’s wonderful book, *Celebration of Discipline*: “To worship is to experience Reality, to touch Life. It is to know, to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community.”⁶

O dear ones, this is my prayer for us: that *every time* we gather for worship, we would know and feel and experience Jesus. That our worship together would be a time when we declare publicly and with great passion that God is real. “We love you, too, Lord.”

That God is great, God is worthy, He is awesome, all-powerful, all-loving. That God is Healer, Provider, King, Rock, Refuge, Shepherd, Teacher, Protector, Savior. “We love you, too, Lord.”

That He is the saver of marriages, the healer of broken relationships, the restorer of broken dreams, and the One who runs to welcome the prodigal home. “We love you, too, Lord.”

May our worship declare that *this* is the Ultimate Reality: God is, God loves, and God can be found. And He is found and known and experienced most fully in Jesus. The One who is more impressed by the actions of devotion and love of a prostitute than He is critical of her flagrant immorality.

“We love you, too, Lord.”

⁶ Ibid.