

A shepherd was herding his flock in a remote pasture when suddenly a brand-new BMW advanced towards him. The driver, a young man in a sharp suit, Gucci shoes, and Ray Ban sunglasses, leans out the window and asks the shepherd: "If I tell you exactly how many sheep you have in your flock, will you give me one?" The shepherd looks at the man, looks at his peacefully grazing flock and calmly answers: "Sure. Why not?" This yuppie parks his car, whips out his Dell notebook computer, connects it to his I-phone, connects via the internet to a GPS satellite navigation system to get an exact fix on his location, which he then feeds to another satellite that takes an ultra- high-resolution photo of the area. He then opens the digital photo in Adobe Photoshop and exports it to an image processing facility in Hamburg, Germany. Within seconds, he receives an email on his I-Phone that the image has been processed and the data stored. He then accesses an Excel spreadsheet, uploads all of this data via email and, after a few minutes, receives a response. Finally, he prints out a full-color, 150-page report on his miniaturized HP LaserJet printer and finally turns to the shepherd and says: "You have exactly 1586 sheep." "That's right. Well, I guess you can take one of my sheep," says the shepherd. He watches the young man select one of the animals and looks on amused as the young man stuffs it into the trunk of his car. Then the shepherd says to the young man: "Hey, if I can tell you exactly what your business is, will you give me back my sheep?" The young man thinks about it for a second and then says, "Okay, why not?"

"You're a consultant," says the shepherd. "Wow! That's correct," says the yuppie, "but how did you guess that?" "No guessing required." answered the shepherd. "You showed up here even though nobody called you; you want to get paid for an answer I already knew; to a question I never asked; and you don't know anything about my business... Now take my sheep dog out of the trunk of your car!" Despite all his advantages, all his high-tech tools, the consultant in this story lacked wisdom – he did not see or act accurately. In the NRSV the reading in Ephesians began, "Be careful then how you live", the Greek of this text can also be rendered, "Therefore look accurately how you walk." Our three-sentence text in Ephesians today is an exhortation to accurate living, living with a God-focus, living with a God- focus that calls us to walk faithfully, to concern ourselves with what really matters, living as our worship God, worshipping God as we live.

"Be filled with the Spirit", says our text, "be filled with the Holy Spirit of God as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

I want to apply this text to the desire and intention of our Church to Worship, celebrating God in all that we do. Within our Mission Statement in the term WORDS – the "W" represents Worship – the "W" comes first. Doing this may have been quite intentional or it may have been the result of choosing an acronym that made sense – either way I would submit that Worship does come first as an expression of who we are and what we do as Christians, as a community, as a Church. The worship of God is the most unique, most important, most central activity to which we are called. Yes, worship will inspire and be surrounded by many other activities, relationships, programs, but to worship God is the first of the Ten Commandments and the first of Jesus' two greatest commandments, when, using the term, "Love the Lord your God" our Savior enjoins us to worship God, worshipping God in such a way that we are immediately called to act in a certain way to one another and others. Loving God, worshipping God, immediately and fully calls us to love our neighbors!

In the Reformed tradition within which we belong as the Presbyterian Church, worship is the work of the people, not the activity of only certain people; worship is the activity of the entire congregation,

the whole community, not an activity devolved or restricted to a few. Week by week when we gather together on the Lord's Day – the Day of Creation, the Day of Resurrection, the Day of the Spirit's coming at Pentecost, we share what we call "liturgy" – the words and ideas, the music and poetry, the prayers and litanies, that form part of the activity of worship. The English word, Liturgy, comes from the Greek word λειτουργία (leitourgia), a word that means public work or duty, quite literally the work of the people, the work of all the people, the entire community. By limiting the word "liturgy" to the prepared, planned, structured, printed common prayers, we rob this word of a hugely important meaning – that liturgy, that the entire act of worship is the work of the people – not the work of the preacher or the choir or just a few. Liturgy is the work, the spiritual work of all God's people.

In greeting and welcoming, in speaking, in listening, in confessing, in being assured of God's love, in praying, in silence, in singing, in hearing, in preaching, in receiving, in giving, in sharing, in thanking, in affirming, in pouring and sprinkling, in breaking and pouring, in commissioning, in being blessed and sent – in all these ways we worship – in all these actions and attitudes we pay attention to God as we worship, and all these actions and attitudes are liturgy, the work of the people.

In history and even to the present day we make a grave error when we ever imagine that worship is done by some "up front" observed by others. Sure church architecture can at times make it look like we are in a theater or a concert hall where there is a space for performers and a space for an audience .... But the truth is very, very different. Gathered as the Church of Jesus Christ as the community of faith, ALL of us, ALL of us are on the stage, there is no space in the Sanctuary for an audience, as a congregation we all share in the act of worshipping God – the activity is a fully communal activity with God and God alone as the audience. Worship is the work of the people, the work of all the people, all the time, in every way.

Today, all of you have made a very odd choice. On this hot, heavy Sunday in the dog days of August, you—unlike 80% of Americans—have chosen to be gathered together in Christian community to honor God and seek God's purpose for your life and for our life together. You have chosen to engage in this primitive ritual we call, worship. You have chosen to separate yourself for a time from the world—from the cultural norms of material comfort and leisure and self-sufficiency. Among all the reasons for this choice is your hunger for God.

The hunger that we know is not and ought not to be the hunger for more stuff, for satisfaction now! It is a hunger for meaning and a way of living that makes sense in a disturbed and disturbing world, where bad things do happen to both bad people and good people. It is a hunger for God even as we or those we love experience aching loss and forsaken absence, longing and hoping that somehow we will discover or find or receive astonishing newness.

There is gracious good news today from God for you and for all people who care to hear it, receive it and trust it. The God whom we worship is the God who because of Good Friday knows all about aching loss, and knows our aching loss. The God we praise is the God who because of the day we call Holy Saturday, when Christ lay dead in the tomb, still experiences our forsaken absence. The God we honor is also the God who offers astonishing newness to all people, the astonishing newness that alone sprouts forth from the joy and victory that is Easter.

The God who loves you and who will never abandon you calls you, and calls us all, not into material acquisition but into worshipful participation. In the Good News of God's Gospel of Grace, God comes, in the person of Jesus, inviting us to worship, inviting us to engage in outreach by sharing and serving those in need, inviting us to restored and renewed relationships, inviting us to discipleship, inviting us to support the life of our church as it seeks to be the Body of Christ together and for the world. Worship, Outreach, Relationships, Discipleship, Support – WORDS, not a linear list but a circle, a circle of living, trusting, learning, serving, working, worshipping.

When we understand that worship is liturgy, that worship is work, the work of the people we can come to see all that worship asks and demands of us, worship as work takes us being prepared to worship God, awake, alert, expectant, ready to be fully engaged, on the edge of our seats, paying rapt attention, expecting to encounter God and to be encountered by God.

Writer Annie Dillard in her 1982 book, *Teaching a Stone to Talk* has a marvelous paragraph that challenges me and maybe can challenge all of us in our expectations of what we do we gather to worship God week by week, she writes, "Why do people in churches seem like cheerful, brainless tourists on a packaged tour of the Absolute? On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of the conditions. Does any-one have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake some day and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return."

My friends, God is here, God is always with us and for us, having accepted God's invitation to share in worship as the work of this people, let us expect an encounter with God, an encounter that will continue to change our lives, such that we will be able to be careful how we will live, looking accurately how we will walk. Amen.