

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

May 29th, 2011 (#438a)

Title: "Worship: The Language of Heaven ... The Language of Love"

Text: Revelation 4:1-11

Sandra James was busy doing her normal housework activities when she heard her three-year-old daughter, Katherine, singing. When she stopped to listen, this is what she heard: *"I love you Lord, and I lift my noise!"*

During a time of singing, an elderly woman was standing in church with her eyes closed and her hands raised in praise. The three-year-old boy standing on the pew in front of her turned around and gave the startled woman a high-five!

As we have just heard, worship does bring all kinds of responses! And this morning I want us to turn to the fourth chapter of the book of Revelation as we look at what it means to worship God. Revelation chapter 4, beginning with verse 1. Hear God's unchanging Word.

After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle.

Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." (Revelation 4:1-11; NIV) This is God's Word.

The confessions and catechisms of the Church tells us that we need to do it. The Bible tells us that God is seeking people who will do it (John 4:23). And John Calvin tells us that it is what differentiates humans from brute beasts (Institutes 1.3.3). And what is it? It ... is *"worship."*

The word *"worship"* comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word *"weorth-scipe"* which over the passage of time became *"worth-ship"* and then was even later shortened to *"worship."* To worship means literally *"to ascribe or attribute worth."* That is why we read in Revelation 4:11 that God is *"worthy to receive glory and honor and power."*

This morning I want to concentrate on worship, but in order to do so, I need to discuss praise. And in doing so, I want to make a distinction between praise and worship. While there has been a lot written on this subject (and not everyone agrees), I see the main difference between praise and worship is that **praise involves responding to God for what He has done while worship centers upon who God is and the qualities or attributes God possesses.**

When we praise God, we are responding to what God has done for us. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the Psalms. *"Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits"* (103:1,2). Then David follows this up by telling us what God has done... his benefits to us. *"He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases; he redeems my life from the pit and crowns me with love and compassion. He satisfies my desires with good things, so that my youth is renewed like the eagle's."* "I will praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made" the psalmist tells us in the 139th chapter. *"Shout with joy to God, all the earth! Sing to the glory of his name; offer him glory and praise! Say to God, 'How awesome are your deeds!' ... Come and see what God has done, how awesome are his works in man's behalf ... Praise our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard; for he has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping ..."* (66:1f).

When you praise God you are commending Him to others and boasting of Him. And how do we do that? The Bible tells us that we can praise God by our speaking, by our singing (Ps. 147:1), by playing musical instruments (Ps. 150), by offering thanksgiving (Ps. 69:30), even by dancing (Ps. 149:3) and lifting up our hands (Ps. 134:2). These are just a few of the ways you can praise God. The Bible commands us to praise the Lord. *"Let everything that has breath praise the Lord"* (Ps 150:6). We praise God, because he is worthy of our praise for all the wonderful things he has done on our behalf. And it is with praise that we are to enter into God's presence. *"Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise"* (Ps. 100:4).

While praise centers upon what God has done, worship centers upon who God is and the qualities or attributes God possesses. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the book of Revelation. In the last book of the Bible, the Apostle John - while in exile on the island of Patmos in the Mediterranean Sea, is given a vision of heaven. And in this vision he sees and hears the sights and sounds of glory. Pure worship is offered to the One upon the throne by the angels and elders and countless multitudes of people from every nation, tribe, and language. In chapter 4 we find that the living creatures and elders worship God because he is the Creator. *"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."* **God is worthy of our worship because He is the Creator.**

As the heavenly drama continues to unfold in chapter 5, John begins to weep because no one has been found worthy to open the

scroll. But one of the elders informs him that there is One who has been found worthy ... *"the Lion of the tribe of Judah"* who is also the Lamb of God. *"You are worthy"* sing the living creatures and the elders, *"to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation."* **And here we have the second key reason to worship God. God is not only the Creator, but he is also the Redeemer. Other reasons that we find throughout scripture that God is to be worshipped are because of his holiness and because he is the eternal King.**

As I was thinking about this difference between praise and worship, I remembered Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well in John 4. *"A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks"* (4:23). So if I praise God without worshipping him, is that enough? When we come together on Sunday mornings, is it possible that we could praise God, and yet somehow stop short of worshipping Him?

Christians have often assumed that they have worshipped God simply because they have been in church! Don't we even call it *"a service of worship"*? But how much does that sound like the Israelites who assumed that they worshipped God simply because they had been to his temple! In either case, worship of God does not necessarily take place.

What would it look like if we truly worshipped God? First of all, I don't believe that we can just *"jump"* into worship. There needs to be personal preparation. What happens here with God on a Sunday morning is directly related to what has happened in our personal lives with God the preceding week. We just don't jump into his presence. We need to fight against the fast food mentality that has become such a big part of our culture. Yes, you may get some nourishment from a McDonald's meal that is delivered to you in three minutes. But a nutritious feast takes time. Howard Stevenson, the worship and choir leader at a church which Chuck Swindoll formerly pastored, has written this about worship: *"If a good sermon needs time to develop and drive home a point, so does authentic worship. Worship needs at least fifteen to twenty minutes to build."*

Secondly, there is so much in our lives that will squash the spirit of worship if it is not dealt with. Before her passing Ruth Bell Graham reminded us that *"worship and worry cannot live in the same heart; they are mutually exclusive."* And so are worship and unforgiveness. Worship and bitterness. Worship and self-centeredness. Worship and ... you fill in the blank! If you and I take the time and pray about it, we know what keeps us from opening our hearts to truly worship God.

Thirdly, if we are really concerned about worship, then we had better be ready for change. I like what Richard Foster has said about worship and change. *"If worship does not change us, it has not been worship. To stand before the Holy One of eternity is to change. Worship begins in holy expectancy; it ends in holy obedience."* Jesus Christ came to make worshipers out of us rebels. We who were once self-centered had to be completely changed so that we could shift our attention away from ourselves and on to Him who is worthy of our worship.

Fourthly, if we really worship, we become centered - not on what the leaders in front are doing, nor on what the person in the pew in front of you is up to, nor even on how good the person at the keyboard is doing, but upon the awesome majesty and holiness and greatness of God. We can sing *"Majesty, worship his majesty,"* but if all we are thinking about is what happened last night, are we really focusing in on God's majesty? We can sing *"How Great Thou Art,"* but if we are thinking about what we've done for God, are we really worshipping him? I wonder how often Jesus weeps because his people have failed to worship Him? How often has the Father not found what he has been looking for?

Bob Greene was a columnist for many years for the Chicago Tribune. In his book *Good Morning Merry Sunshine*, he recounted his infant daughter's first year of life. When little Amanda began crawling, he recorded: *"This is something I'm having trouble getting used to. I will be in bed reading a book or watching TV. And I will look down at the foot of the bed and there will be Amanda's head staring back at me."*

"Apparently I've become one of the objects that fascinate her. ... It's so strange. After months of having to go to her, now she is choosing to come to me. I don't know quite how to react. All I can figure is that she likes the idea of coming in and looking at me. She doesn't expect anything in return. I'll return her gaze and in a few minutes she'll decide she wants to be back in the living room and off she'll crawl again."

The simple pleasure of looking at the one you love - what Bob and his daughter enjoyed - is what we enjoy each time we worship God and bask in his presence. Worship is the language of love ... of wanting to come into my Abba's presence and enjoy Him. It presupposes a relationship - a mutual love relationship - that makes you want to be there.

Our first ministry is to worship God. That is why we were created. And if we do everything else in life ... if we attain all our goals and dreams ... if we reach our highest ambitions, yet fail to truly worship God, we will have failed in life. And worship must come before work. If we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all the things we need will be given to us as well.

Are you ready? Are you ready to worship Him? Come into His presence ... and let His presence come into you. Amen.

CALL TO OFFERING

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The Greek word for "steward" is "oikonomos." We get our English word "economy" from it. An "oikonomos" was the manager of a household. He was a servant "to whom the head of the house had entrusted the management of his business dealings, taking care of receipts and expenditures, and the duty of giving out what was needed to the other servants and to the children not yet of age." We are stewards of everything God has entrusted with us. But the question that must be asked is this: Are we being faithful and wise in dealing with that which God has entrusted us?