

May 16, 2021

They were continually in the temple blessing God... did you ever wonder how is God blessed? Is it by worship or praise or offerings? Or is it simply by saying, "We bless you God"? It's all of these things. God wants us to be together in worship. I hear a lot of people, when I tell them I'm a pastor, say, "I worship by myself, at the boat or on the golf course or in the woods." And that is fine, if they truly are giving God the glory, for once in a while. Once in a while it's ok to be away from corporate worship. However, we cannot grow when we are not connected to God and to one another. The cross has two beams. One is perpendicular to the ground, that's the connection between God and us. We can spend as much time as we'd care to on building that connection alone, by ourselves, as we study and pray and meditate on the Bible.

The other beam, the horizontal one, is the one we seem to forget. It's the one that connects us to other people. The Bible has many places where people are urged to worship together, as a group. Psalm 34:3 "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together", Ephesians 5:19 "Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord", Hebrews 2:12 "I will proclaim your name to my people, in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise", Matthew 18:20 "wherever 2 or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in their midst."

I know I am preaching to those of you who faithfully attend worship here this morning, but I want you to know how important it is that we come together to worship. Some people like to think of it as "getting filled up for the week", others say their week doesn't go right if they aren't in church on Sunday. But do you know the reason we are here? It's not for us! Even though we gain the benefit, it's not for us... it is to glorify God, to worship God, to praise God, to bless God. Through this time of meditation on God's word we are strengthened in our faith, our bonds with other Christians are strengthened; we reap the benefits of corporate worship, simply because we take the time to come to church. Simply because we bless God with our presence, and our voices, and our offering.

Yet, the horizontal arm of the cross does not only mean we build relationships with people in the church. It means we build relationships with other persons as well in order to bring them to Jesus, or, if they're Christian, to strengthen one another in the faith. I have a really good friend, Carla. She sends out a devotional text every morning. We usually get together once a month, and when I spend time with her I am refreshed because she is so fun to be with, and we talk about Godly things. We strengthen one another's faith. It's so good to have a friend like that. I also spend time once a month with other pastors in a continuing education class. Tina, who is the facilitator, is married to a pastor. We were discussing something theological in the group on Wednesday and Tina made the remark that it was good to be in theological discussion. And one of the others in the class said, "What, you mean you and Brian don't have these discussions at your dinner table?" And we all laughed when she said, "No, our discussions lately have been, 'What part of your body hurts today?'" But seriously, it is so good to grow our relationships with God and with one another as we gather together.

If you don't have opportunities to be engaged with other Christians you can do this here at church the next time a Bible study is offered... And take a moment, is there someone you can build a deeper relationship with putting Jesus at the center?

All of this to answer how do we bless God, when the real attention today should be on the ascension of Christ. Jesus was crucified; he died on that 2-beamed cross; he was laid in a new, empty tomb; the stone was sealed. Three days later, the tomb was empty. Jesus walked the earth again, spending 40 more days with his disciples, teaching them where it is in scriptures proving he is the Messiah. Yet, Jesus could not stay on earth... His home is not on earth. 40 days after he rose from the grave he arose into heaven. He was lifted up in the clouds. He returned to where he belongs. He is seated at the right hand of God almighty where he judges those who live eternally and those who die. He intercedes for us, taking away our sin.

Jesus and his disciples went out to Bethany, near where Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived, and he was taken up into the clouds. Jesus lived, died, and will come again. When Jesus returns, no one knows the day or the hour, but when Jesus returns he will come the way he left... in glory, descending from the sky. In our clergy continuing education class on Wednesday we were also talking about how many people are living for the end times, who can't wait until Jesus returns and calls them home. Instead of living a life that glorifies, that blesses God and concentrating on the here and now, they are looking forward to something that may not even happen in their lifetime. We as Christians are always held in the tension of the now and not yet. We live in the now, where we are called to be like Jesus, to be the hands of Jesus in the world, to build the kin-dom; we await the not yet where we are at home with Jesus, living in the glorious kingdom.

Jesus one day will come in glory and all people will bow down to acknowledge he is the ruler of the universe. He will return the same way he left, from the sky. Jesus was, Jesus is, Jesus will come again.

All Glory be to God. Amen