

“What is Worship, When Am I Worshipping?”

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Opening Prayer

Good Morning and welcome here to Kasson/Pleasant Corners UMC. I am Pastor Jake Hanson, and it is a joy to be here in worship with you. If you are new here or if this is your first time here in a while, a special welcome to you. God willing you will find our church to be a friendly environment that is absolutely dedicated to serving the Lord. This month, for the weeks in which I am present, we will be focusing on “worship.” Worship is one of those things that we talk about all the time in church, but the actual meaning and purpose tends to get lost in the shuffle and vernacular. What really is worship? How do I actually worship? Is it worship to pray and read my Bible, or is it only singing? Is it worship if I do something good for my neighbor? Do I have to worship in church, or can it happen anywhere? Why do we worship like we do in church? How do I worship in really difficult times, when life is tough? All of those are great questions and hopefully over the month of November we will touch on each of them. As always, if there are any questions or thoughts that you have regarding the topic of the sermon, don’t hesitate to track me down outside of service and ask questions. We also have Sunday morning Bible Studies, small groups throughout the week, Youth Group on Wednesdays, and more specifically so that you have a place to encounter the Lord and ask questions beyond just what little is covered in service. With that being said, as we begin to talk about worship, we appropriately are beginning with what worship is. All worship, whether big or small, covert or overt, will conform to one simple thing... it will honor the Lord. The way to check if it is actually doing that or not is to put it to the smell test.

Usually when we hear the word worship we think about Sunday service. We call it a “Worship Service,” and we call all of the music we sing “Worship Music” or “Praise Music.” But, Beloved Congregation, worship is so much bigger than just singing songs for the Lord or coming to church on Sunday. Our reading from Psalm 29 helps us to understand what worship at its core really is when it says “Ascribe to the Lord, O sons of the mighty, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in holy array.” Beloved, worship at its most simple is giving reverence and adoration to the Lord, which is what Psalm 29 means when it uses the word “ascribe.” Big picture, in the most simple terms, worship then is anything that brings Him glory. Following the commandments, holding as important what He holds as important, loving our neighbors, having an attitude of servitude towards the King of kings, this is what worship is. When we do what the Lord calls us to do and then attribute that to Him, we are ascribing to Him the glory. That is worship.

Most of you hopefully know what the smell test is. The smell test is usually performed on a pair of socks or underwear that you find on the floor. How do you know if they’re dirty or clean? Easy, you hold them up to your nose and take a whiff. The same test applies also to milk that is a little past the expiration date. How do you know if it is good or not? Open it up and take a whiff! If the socks are dirty, or if the milk is spoiled, you will know very quickly. If we apply this concept to worship, which is a big and vast thing, we can see pretty quickly whether or not something is worship. A different way to think about would be to think about it like the duck question. If it looks like a duck, smells like a duck, walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, then it is probably a duck. If what we are doing brings glory to the Lord, helps our neighbor, brings us and

others closer to Jesus, and if we are speaking on His truths then it is worship.

The big question in all of this, the “smell test” question if you will, is who is getting the praise? Who is getting the praise and adoration for what you are doing? Who is the primary beneficiary of your actions, is it you or your neighbor or God? If we think about anything that is done for God’s benefit or our neighbor’s benefit as generally being worship, all of a sudden our view on serving the Lord opens up. Am I worshipping the Lord when I pray? The smell test says yes of course. Am I worshipping the Lord when I help an old lady cross the street? Smell test says, usually. Am I worshipping the Lord when I am in my tree stand hunting? The smell test says maybe... if you are praying and using it as a restful opportunity to get closer to the Lord, but most often probably not. (That doesn’t mean it is bad! We just shouldn’t think that it makes for a substitute for being with other believers.) Am I worshipping the Lord when I am reading my Bible? Yes of course. Am I worshipping the Lord when I am quilting? Maybe... but only if I am doing it with the express purpose of glorifying the Lord. Do you see the way in which this works? Not everything that is not exclusively worship is bad (working on my car, taking a relaxing drive, sleeping, etc.) but we shouldn’t be fooled into thinking that worship is something that just happens. Worship has an intentionality piece to it. Worship does not happen when we are unintentional. In fact, many people come to church each Sunday in our country (this was my family growing up) and sit in service and sing the songs and shake hands and sit quietly... but never do engage in worship.

Our second reading for today came from Isaiah 29:13-16. It is a stark warning for us that our intentions matter. “Because this people draw

near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote.” That was written to the Israelites in a time right before the exile came. Shortly after this is written the Babylonians will come and ransack Jerusalem, and exile the inhabitants for many years. The reason for this punishment is what is given right here, the Israelites say that they are God’s people but do not care for His words truly at all. What this really means is that they would go and observe the Lord in the temple, then worship different gods and goddesses outside in their daily lives. They weren’t paying any heed to the Lord within their hearts. They were going through the motions, but they weren’t really giving Him the glory. They weren’t praising Him, they weren’t revering Him, they weren’t ascribing to Him the glorious things that were happening, they were just pretending to be good followers. This is a good warning for us, Beloved Congregation, in how we worship.

It is well documented that the most common reason people do not come to church is that they see all these folks inside who claim to be Christians, but then don’t really live like it. Now we are all sinners, that is for sure, but there is some major truth to what these people are saying. Does your worship, inside and outside the church, reflect your Creator? Do you worship with intentionality of loving the Lord and loving your neighbor as yourself? We need to ask ourselves those hard questions regularly, so that we can stay on track with the Lord. I don’t want my worship in or outside of church to be just empty words, I want my worship to be intentional. I hope you are catching the big picture of worship here, Beloved Congregants. Worship isn’t just something small, it is an intentional lifestyle, and I want mine to pass the smell test.

Our reading from Romans 12 helps us to understand the big picture of worship. The Apostle Paul writes to them and us, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." It is our whole lives, Beloved, it is our whole lives that should be involved in worship. Worship isn't something that you stop when you walk out the doors on Sunday morning, and it isn't something that you accomplished when you read your Bible that one time once. It is an ongoing, intentional, sacrificial way of living that praises the Lord every step of the way. That is the ideal. No one is perfect, of course, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't be getting better at worshipping the Lord as we grow as Christians. (Sanctifying Grace anyone?) The rest of our reading in Romans 12 helps us to really put this concept into practice for us, to put faces to names if you will. We are told what a worshipping life of a Christian will look like if it is passing the smell test. There is humility (vs. 3), camaraderie in the church (vs. 4-5), there is a using of gifts given by God (vs.6-8), there is love for each other without hypocrisy (vs.9-10), there is peace (vs. 14.) We could go on and on with examples like that, but you get the idea. Worshipping the Lord well means that we are striving after Him in every facet of our lives. It means that all that we are, all that we do, all that aspire to, is tied up into Him. That is how we were made to live by the way. It is the best way. A man or woman who lives in reverence to the Lord, who worships Him well, will not intentionally harm another person, will treat God's creation with respect, will live a life that is devoid (mostly... still sinful of course) of hypocrisy and sin. Beloved, our whole lives should be passing that smell test. Our whole lives are supposed to be given over to the Lord. In everything that we do, worshipping Him should be a component. This sermon isn't about

making anyone feel guilty, but rather it is about motivating you to revere and praise and ascribe and honor and love the Lord in all that you do! It is about living a life that you were made to lead, about living a worship filled life.

With all of that in mind, as we worship Him today on a Communion Sunday, let us hold close to our hearts our final verses from Hebrews 12:28-29. “Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.” Knowing that He is great, and mighty, and worthy of praise, let us leave here today keeping in mind what worship is. It is the intentional revering and praise of our Lord. How do we know if we are doing that or not? Our worship should pass the smell test. Let us pray.

Closing Prayer