

“Why Do We Do What We Do in Church?”

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Opening Prayer

Good Morning and welcome to KUMC/PCUMC. I am Pastor Jacob Hanson, and it is always a joy to be here with you in worship. If this is your first time here, or your first time here in a while, a special welcome to you. It is our prayer that you will find our church welcoming, and more importantly, Godly, in form and function. During the first few weeks of November we are focusing on worship in our services. We often will hear about worship, but the specifics can be a little fuzzy. We know about worship services, worship music, worship groups, etc., but if we dig a little bit deeper there are quite a few questions that can surface. What is worship? When are we worshipping? Why do we worship the way we do in church? How do we worship when it is difficult to do so? Over the few weeks in November where I am here we are hopefully going to touch on all those questions. Last week we looked at what worship at its core really is, which is anything that ascribes glory and praise to the Lord. This week we touch on that second major set of questions. Why do we do what we do in church? Why do we worship the way that we do here? Our scripture readings give us a clue into why we do what we do in service here, and why these same things are repeated in just about every church across the globe. But first we have to mention what is not our focus for today, that being “adiaphora.”

Adiaphora, as defined by Martin Luther, is anything that is done in worship that is not essential. Some things that would fall into this category would be style of worship music, type of language spoken, and the physical set up of the church building. The good Lord did not say

that we had to worship in song only with an organ, or a saxophone, or a digeridoo, but instead that we are simply to sing praises to the Lord. The Lord did not specify in scripture what kind of building we must worship in, or even that we must worship in a building. You can serve the Lord equally well here in our church as you can in a house church or even in a field. Often when we pick a church to attend it is honestly based upon the adiaphora, it is based on our likes and dislikes for things like this. That isn't bad, and adiaphora does still have some importance, but it isn't the core of worship. What we are looking at this morning is not the adiaphora of our churches, but rather the scripturally-based, soul-sustaining, life-giving essence of worship that colors what church really is. To that end, we are looking at a few aspects of our service that are essential: prayer, creeds, teaching the scriptures, community, testimony, and the giving of glory to our Lord. There are more, but these really cover the majority of what we do.

If you have been in our churches much you may have noticed that we do a lot of praying. We pray together in a prayer of confession, we pray together over the blessings and concerns, we pray together before and after the sermon, we pray the Lord's prayer together, and we pray to close the service. We do this at the calling of many scriptures like the first one we read today, James 5:15-20. James 5 affirms that our prayers have meaning, they restore the sick (not physically maybe every time, but definitely spiritually, vs. 15), they heal us from our sins through prayerful confession (vs. 16), and they lead us and others towards salvation. (vs. 20) Beloved, this is why we pray for each other each and every service. Any church worth their salt will have prayer as a core foundational piece. Ours is no exception. In fact even outside of service you will see that pray is a piece of everything. Our meetings, our Bible Studies, our councils, our Youth Group, everything will begin

and end with prayer. Prayer is a core function which is why we do it. In addition to prayer you will see that the creeds we pray/affirm together are there for a reason.

Almost every week, including this one, we go through one of the two major creeds. There are other creeds out there that are good, but the Nicene Creed and the Apostle's Creed have become core foundational statements in the majority of churches worldwide over the last 1600 years or so. The reason that these creeds exist, and the reason that we affirm them just about every week, is because they lay out for us pretty succinctly the basis for our faith. The core and foundational truths of Christianity are expressed and we affirm that we believe them when we speak this together in church. "I believe" is how all of the statements in the creed begin, and that is actually what we are (hopefully) telling each other when we speak this together. These core truths that are affirmed are that God created everything (Genesis 1:1), that Jesus is His only son (Mark 1:1), that Jesus was crucified (John 19), that Jesus rose again (Luke 24), so on and so forth. Every piece of the creeds that we affirm (specifically the Nicene and Apostles) is based firmly in the truth, and we affirm that truth together when we recite them. Affirming the truth, the core of who we are as believers, is why we do this each week. In addition to prayer and affirming the creeds, a major piece of church is teaching the scriptures. In fact this might be the most important part of service other than bringing glory to God.

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 reminds us that knowing scripture isn't just a nice thing for us to do on the side, it is essential for us as believers. Knowing the written word of God, knowing His will, knowing His laws, knowing His commandments, knowing His Son, knowing our past and our future as believers, all this comes from scripture. In Deuteronomy Moses

writes at God's behest to the Israelites that they should remember God's word. "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." The meaning here is clear, Beloved Congregation, we have to take scripture seriously and know it well. Knowing your Bible, being intimate with it, is akin to knowing the Lord's will. It is how He has chosen to speak to us in a clear and easily understandable (for the most part) manner. It is the primary thing that we teach from and preach from in our churches. It is honestly why many of you are here. Of course community and singing and friendship and things like that play a role, but honestly we are here because we want to know what God thinks. We want to know what He says, what His plans are, what His will is, what He has promised us, how we should interpret His words in our time, etc. All that is based in the Bible, and we should know it well. Here in our churches, the reason we spend much time looking into scripture and preaching on it and teaching on it, is because it is how we get to know what God has revealed to us. Other than giving glory to God as a whole (of which this is a part), nothing is more important in service than this, because God's word will sustain you when all else fails. Every sermon I will ever preach will be based on God's written word. If ever you enter a church or hear a message with something other than God's Holy Word at its center, then you may want to reconsider everything that is being said there. It is about the Lord, not us. Accordingly, we spend the majority of our time doing what Deuteronomy tells us to, which is teaching this word to each other, discussing it, and marking our lives with it. Scripture is important,

never forget that Beloved. Now with all that being said, many of the things we have talked about theoretically could be done on our own outside of the church. Learning scripture, affirming the truth, and prayer can all be (and should be!) done both in and outside of this place. However the community aspect of worship is something that can only be done with other believers, and so accordingly is done here.

1st Peter 4:8-10 read “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” On our own it is very difficult to love other Christians, to be hospitable to others, and it is impossible to employ our gifts in serving each other. Many, many, many gifts of believers go completely unused within the church for the glory of the Lord because the people with those God-given gifts simply do not show up. To love each other, pray for each other, be with each other in times of need, and to serve the Lord as a group we need to be together. Maybe you have wondered why the church building itself needs to exist, and why we need to spend money on a minister and on a building and on outreach programs and stuff like that... this is an important reason why. We need this community. Without it we are all alone, and alone we are easily swayed away from the truth. This is why we as our churches have gone to great lengths to make sure that small groups, Bible studies, men and women groups, Youth Group, Sunday school, coffee hour, special celebrations, etc. exist... because it fosters community among God’s people and brings us together. In your time of need, death of a loved one, your own impending passing, the raising of children, difficult life circumstances, whatever, you will need a community like this. In times of need for others, they will need YOU.

Community in church is huge, don't neglect it Beloved Congregation. By the way, if you are new or newer here, know that there is a place here for you. If you are looking for a welcoming church home to use your God-given gifts in glory to Him and service to your fellow man, then this is the place for you. In addition to the community things that we do together, we also participate in something that is related to all of these points that we have covered thus far on Sunday mornings. We testify to the Lord together.

Every Sunday, as a part of the scripture we read and the prayers we pray and the creeds we confess, we testify to the Lord together about what is true. Hebrews 2:1-4 shares with us why this is important. Hebrews 2:1 says "For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it." By all of the things we do we testify about what it is that we believe, and we do this so that we as believers would not stray away from the truth. In our world it is easy to leave the church, and more importantly, the faith. It is easy to step outside of these walls and only show up when it is convenient, or easy, or when we want. Sometimes that is ok, we need space or we are on vacation or we are visiting family or we have to pull an extra shift at work. However, to step outside of the church, this community, this truth, leaves us open to attack. We have an enemy who hates us and we have awful sinful desires that we are fighting. To go it alone means we risk falling to one or both of these enemies. We have talked about this here before, but it is always worth mentioning again: we need each other Beloved. No Christian man or woman can go it alone, and even if you are doing well in this world by yourself you will always be a better Christian in community. No question about it, if you value your relationship with Christ, then you also must value your church family. All of this is to say, everything we do in church,

everything that we are, whether we are praying, teaching scripture, testifying about Christ, walking together in community, or even worrying about the adiaphora, everything that we do as Christians is absolutely centered around giving glory to the Lord.

Our final reading, and our final parting thought, for this morning on worship is that everything we do should be giving the glory to the Lord. Psalm 119 is a big list of prayers to God centered around following His statutes and commandments. If you are wondering about how to give glory to the Lord, everything we previously have talked about today brings Him glory. We do all these things in church service for this reason, that they bring Him glory. At the end of the day though, this is about you and your Creator. All that we do here on a Sunday morning, all the praying, all the community stuff, all the testifying, all the teaching of the creeds and scripture, all of that is done so that we might be more intimately connected to our Lord. As it says in Psalm 119:10-11 “With all my heart I have sought You; do not let me wander from Your commandments. Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You.” Beloved, that is the prayer in all that we do here in service, that we all would seek after the Lord better. Let us pray.

Closing Prayer