

Shaping Our Souls - Worship & Celebration

Psalm 63

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For the last few Sunday evenings we have thought about the phrase WWJD – *What Would Jesus Do?* We have affirmed the challenge to live by those four words. Trying to chart the course of our life by the answers we could give.

But we have done so with a qualifier.

Can anyone remember what that qualifier was for WWJD?

[seek feedback]

We affirmed that it simply wouldn't be enough to haul WWJD out when we were facing particularly challenging moments in our lives. Because then we'd only be doing half a job. We'd only be giving the bracelet or poster half credit.

Remember why we said this?

It was because the life of Jesus consisted not only of important challenge moments, points of major decision, and times of crisis.

In fact, those sorts of moments, moments like the time of temptation which we considered this morning, were in the minority.

Most of Jesus' life was lived in the day to day, hour by hour routine that each one of us also encounters. What the Scriptures show to us are the highlights.

Dallas Willard reminds us that **how** Jesus responds in the important moments was shaped by **how** he lived during the in-between seasons.

The **long** chapters were the preparation for those **short** moments.

Much, say, like the athletes who are busy right now over in Turino, Italy at the Winter Olympics. These young men and women have spent years and months and weeks training for these games. Yet their particular event will probably last only hours, or even minutes. How those hours or minutes go depends entirely on how the weeks and months and years were spent.

Routines established and practised over the long haul, with grit and determination and discipline -

- over and over and over and over and over.....

...and over again!

Those routines show themselves during those few powered and intense moments.

So I encouraged you to watch for signs of these routines as you read the gospel accounts of the life of Jesus. If you have your radar up, you'll notice some of those routines.

[Can you think of some of the spiritual discipline practices that showed themselves in the life of Jesus?]

It was his practice to regularly head off for some time alone in prayer.

He had read much in Scripture, and knew it well.

He would fast.... [others?]

These routines kept Jesus closely connected to His heavenly Father. That close connection kept His soul strong, and empowered Him to live the challenging times.

Why do I repeat it? Because the same is true for us. We are called to the same sort of living - WWJD, *What Would Jesus Do* kind of living in all the segments of our lives:

- the challenging moments

- the routine chapters in between those moments

And doing so with the athlete's determination of 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, racing with the determination to win the prize, not a perishable medal or bouquet of flowers or short headline in the paper, but imperishable recognition by the King on Heaven's throne, the accolades of the angels, and a place in the throne room of glory.

Training, self-control, discipline.

A regular part of an athlete's daily routine.

And a regular part of the life of anyone who wants to be an effective Christian, a Christian whose faith is so full and rich and real that people can see Jesus alive in them;

dare we say, becoming a personal Epiphany in them;

Jesus being reflected, shown to the world, in them;

Doing so with the prayerful desire and longing to have the riches of heaven's mystery revealed to us - as St.Paul says in Colossians 1:

Christ in you, the hope of glory.

You and I -

becoming filled up with Christ.

Living life in way that reflects this Christ, who is in you.

Living WWJD in real time high definition, for all to see.

You know, Dallas Willard suggests that the sort of power that radiates from Jesus, his intimate knowledge of God's will, his unshakable following of the Father's direction often seems rather strange.

It seems far away.

It seems disconnected from the sort of Christian life that you and I muddle through.

But, says Willard, it doesn't have to be.

Jesus lived a very fully human life.

And wasn't it Jesus himself who said,

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these...

(John 14:12)

They will be greater works done by believers in Jesus who remain connected to Jesus when he has ascended to heaven;

connected in the same way that Jesus remained connected to the Heavenly Father when he was here on earth.

That connection path was nurtured, polished and practised through the use of careful, regular and routine spiritual practises. It wasn't a connection that just happened. It didn't maintain itself.

For us to live ***Christ in us, the hope of glory*** means the need for regular disciplined spiritual training and exercise.

Christian training - those elements of life that connect us with the Lord and shape our souls so that we gradually begin to act in ways that reflect the Saviour. We train our hearts to live by new habits - the habits that were exhibited in the heart of Christ.

These soul exercises either force us to put some part of our life away for a while, or take up a special activity for a time.

And in that putting away or taking up, we are making decisions with our will, and practising actions with our heart and body that shape us. They deepen our ability to live in relationship with God.

We make little decisions of obedience, which bear large fruit later. For example, a little decision to abstain from watching a television show for a time period helps us to deny ourselves and love others in all sorts of much bigger ways.

We become less enslaved to impulses, and learn to live obediently to God's will.

We come to see that things we thought were critically important, or simply ***had*** to be there, are perhaps not near as important as we first expected.

And we do these exercises as part of our relationship with the Lord.

They're not just items on a "to-do" list.

We do them because we prayerfully desire, through them, to see our lives shaped more closely into the image of God.

We desire, through them, to shed our old nature and become closer to the Lord.

Spiritual disciplines.

Perhaps you remember the ones we've already covered.

We've spent time thinking
about praying,
about living in simplicity,
and about confession.

Tonight comes an item that often isn't thought of as a spiritual discipline. And yet it is one of the most central ones. That is worship.

The **discipline** of worship.

Seeking God, as Psalm 63 puts it.

Recognizing that there is a thirst in the human soul that only the Lord can quench, and going to him deliberately and regularly to have that thirst quenched.

Going into the sanctuary and focussing on God.
Looking deliberately to try and see His power and glory.
Asking for an outpouring and experience of His love.
Opening the lips to praise Him.
Moving the body in a posture of surrender - hands up.

Have you ever thought about worship as a discipline?

It is, you know.

It is, quite frankly, a habit to be cultivated.

There's a hymn in our book entitled, *Out of need and out of custom*.

Number 259 - we recited the lyrics this morning.

At one time I thought that it was wrong to come to church out of custom.

If you were coming because it was a habit, might as well stay home.

Like one or two other occasional thoughts I have had over the years....

....perhaps way more than one or two....

I've discovered...

and all God's people gasped in disbelief!!

that I was...

yes...

not quite right.

Maybe even totally wrong.

Coming to the sanctuary to worship **IS** a habit.

It **IS** a custom.

One drilled into the very core of my being by my parents through years of practice and routine.

And like many other routines they've passed along, I look back now and give thanks to the Lord for it.

The disciplined habit of worship - vital for the nourishment of a soul that otherwise becomes very thirsty.

A soul that needs what Jesus offered to the woman at the well in Samaria - living water (John 4).

A soul that, when it HAS been nourished with the presence of Christ in worship, will experience the flow of inner water rushing out and overflowing into the rest of life (John 7:38).

Looking to God in the Sanctuary - giving drink to thirsty souls.

The discipline of worship.

Discipline - just taking time to go.

Making it central to your sabbath experience.

Takes effort to do that.

I'm glad you do!

There's other discipline to worship, as well.

Consider this - one of the things that most evangelical Christians acknowledge about worship, and structure into the liturgy, is the back and forth nature of worship.

Worship is a dialogue.

Worship is a conversation between God and His gathered people.

God speaks.

And we respond.

Right from the opening words -

"The Lord be with you" says God's servant.

"And also with you" respond God's people.

Dialogue.

That's the theory.

But do we live it?

Enter another facet of spiritual discipline -

Yes, it takes disciplined training of the mind and will and emotions to move them beyond coming into this place with JUST a receptive state.

Hear that?

Beyond **just** a receptive state.

Receptivity when you come in worship is good.

Very good.

Vital, in fact.

But it is not enough.

We need to train ourselves, prepare ourselves, discipline ourselves for more.

Training ourselves to be in a state that is ready to give.

It is easier to come to get, to take, to receive.

But do you notice something about those things?

They are all inputs.

They are all from God to us.

And that, by itself, is not dialogue.

There is no real dialogue without giving back.

Dialogue is **two-way**, not just one way.

And so, as gathered believers coming with thirsty souls to worship, we need to prepare ourselves, and discipline ourselves to give **RESPONSE**.

Response is reflected in Psalm 63.

Can you see it there?

[*seek input*]

Response in worship -

Here at Calvin CRC, the Worship committee will do its part.

Musicians will play as best as they can, stewarding the talents given to them.

And the preacher will seek to muddle along as best he can in being faithful to God's call.

But all of that is for nothing if the worshipper comes without the discipline ready to give, to engage God in true dialogue.

What we're talking about is "**Entering into worship**".

Which is totally opposite of entertainment in worship.

Can you think of the difference between the two?

The difference is not so much a function of what goes on up on the platform.
I've been in all sorts of different congregations where the leadership has struggled with issues of entertainment.
No - it has nothing to do with liturgical style.

Rather, it has **everything** to do with what goes on in the hearts of the believers in the pew.

To "enter into worship" is an active move on the part of the worshipper.

The ancient Greek word for worship, *proskuneo*, means "to kiss toward."
And sometimes worship students will mistakenly think that refers to intimacy in worship, like two lovers. In fact, that isn't AT ALL what the word means.

It actually means the action of a subject coming into the presence of a sovereign king, and bowing to the ground before the king, kissing the dirt. It is submission. It is surrender. It is devotion.

Those are active items on the part of the worshipper.

Items of giving.

Of movement.

And so, in a minute or two the worship team will go trotting up to the front. How to think about them as they face us? Are they performers? Leaders? What are they doing?

We talked about that at one of the last worship team practices. And we came to the conclusion that it might be best to see ourselves as **hosts** to worship, inviting others to join in the great activity of human-divine dialogue.

Others have suggested that worship leaders are like stage hands, while the congregation are the ones involved in the performance. And, if you use that model, the audience is One. The audience is the Lord, and Him alone. Though, be careful with that image, since then it would be a passive audience.

And God is far from passive.

God is active.

As are we.

Worship is DIALOGUE!

It is honest dialogue.

Life dialogue.

And there's a discipline, too - especially for worship planners and leaders.

Do we go through the discipline of proper preparation?

Prayerfully seeking to ensure that there is a full cross section of life that shows itself in worship.

The book of Psalms is a great manual for worship preparation, from that point of view. In preparation, I look to the Psalms for four things:

1. Timing: prayers can be of different lengths
2. Titles: how to address God
3. Topics: what's fair game for praying?
4. Tone: lament, questions, praise, doubt, anger,

Yes, the Psalms is a great worship manual that will certainly stretch you - both for your private personal worship, and for planning and leading corporate worship.

The discipline of worship -

disciplining ourselves to leave the comfort of home and gather with God's people.

disciplining ourselves to give and not just receive

disciplining ourselves to expand the repertoire to include all facets of daily life in what we bring to the sanctuary.

Part of the way that God builds the human soul.

And makes us a little more like Jesus.