

***Called to Worship* ©**

Mark 1:21-28, Psalm 111

February 1, 2015

Rev. Sharlyn Gates

As I reflected on the gospel text from Mark and how Jesus' entering the Synagogue changed everything; how he preached with such authority and even healed a man who was possessed; and how the people were so amazed, I thought about our worship. Well, I didn't just think about our worship here at Holly Presbyterian Church, but about worship in general.

Why do people come to worship? Why do we keep coming back to this place on a regular basis? Do we come for the same old rigmarole? Do we come because we can't wait to sing the songs? You know, the ones the whole church world-wide doesn't agree on? Traditional verses contemporary.

Do we come to worship expecting something? If so, what? What do you want to happen in worship? If you don't want anything to happen, why do you come? While I believe that true worship is purely for the purpose of praising and adoring God, as the Psalmist so beautifully calls us to do in our Call to Worship from Psalm 111, I also think that God uses our worship to work in us, when we are open.

We, the church, are famous for that old saying, "we've never done it that way before," which is another way of saying, "we don't want anything to change."

But I don't believe it. I just don't believe that we really don't want anything to change in our worship. I can't believe that we humans who are created in God's image and are given this natural hunger for God's presence in our lives ... I can't believe we don't want more than the same old thing.

In our Reformed history, we use a saying that is standard for us. "Reformed, and always reforming." Those reformers of long ago – who are such an important part of our past – believed that the church had to change *then*, but that it would continue to need to change as we understood God more, and as the Holy Spirit moved.

God proclaims in several different Scripture passages, "Behold! I am doing a new thing." While God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow ... God does do new and exciting things with God's people.

I have a feeling that somewhere hidden inside of us is a longing for change. So ... I asked myself ... Sharlyn, why do *you* come to worship? And my self answered ... (because I knew the answer I was looking for) ... "I come to worship because I want to praise and thank God."

And so I asked myself *this* question ... "what is it about God that makes you want to praise him?"

And I said, "Because God is wonderful, amazing, I love God."

And why do you love God? And do you really, fully, completely love God? How does that feel? How does it feel to truly praise and adore God?

Well, I had to stop and think about that one. If you think about all the people you love in your life ... who do you love most of all? Who do you love with a passion? Someone you would do anything for? Someone you are downright goofy over? Is it a lover? A husband? A child? A grandchild? How does that love feel in your heart?

Do you allow your heart to feel that same way over God? Or do you keep control over that passion? We wouldn't want to appear radical in our faith, now would we?

And aren't we Reformed worshippers just a little nervous about all this talk about feelings? Don't we prefer to live and worship more from the neck up? But I'm asking you to go with it for today. Allow your feelings to come into play, because knowledge is one thing ... a good and important thing that can influence our feelings. But without feelings, we really don't have relationship. And this is about real relationship!

So ... I asked myself what would I really like to have happen in worship? Not regarding the order or the music but what would I want to have happen to me ... to us as a group?

I thought about it long and hard. I dealt honestly with the fear of change and then I said these things:

I would like to come to worship fully prepared to offer myself ... my heart, soul, mind and body as a true living sacrifice to God. I would like to abandon my inhibitions that keep me rigid and self conscious in worshipping ... to just cut the ropes for a change, forget myself, and turn my full attention to loving and adoring God.

I would like to hear a sermon that would stir me up and cause me to have such a desire to be changed by the Holy Spirit so that I would be more and more like Jesus ... I want to be re formed so that I would see all who are around me in the same way He sees them ... with his unconditional love and mercy.

I want to be so like him that comfort and love and encouragement flow from me to anyone who needs it. I want to be so delighted with giving that I have no concern about whether or not I'm being taken advantage of or lied to, but just that I have a giving, generous spirit.

I want to feel great joy in writing out my check for the offering, or better yet, to fill my pockets with coins and dance my way up to the offering plates and let the coins clink

into them until everyone in the house is laughing ... not *at* me, but *with* me, knowing that God loves a cheerful giver. I want to be that cheerful in my giving.

I want to come to worship and suddenly sense that all the worshippers around me are in unity as we lift our voices in singing praises to God, as we lift our hearts in sincere prayer, as we wait in expectation for the Holy Spirit to re-*form* us, to transform us into the mind and hearts of Christ. That's how I think God wants to reform us, if we would let him.

But I still haven't answered just why I love God. I love him because he first loved me. God formed me in my mother's womb. God looked at me in my worst condition, unlovely, unworthy, lost down in the pit of my own doing and you know what? He loved me then as much as he loves me now. God never forgot me, even when I would forget Him. God says in Isaiah 49:

*Though even a mother may forget her child,
I will not forget you!
See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; (Isaiah 49:15)*

I had a friend tell me once that she prays for me constantly and that she actually has my name written on her palm so she will see it and always remember to pray.

That, beloved, is pure grace. I have not remembered to pray for her all the time; I do not have her name written on my palm. Years go by without our seeing each other, yet she never forgets to keep me in her sight and in her memory.

That's how God is. God loves us when we have done nothing to deserve it. God never forgets us, never lets us go; keeps us engraved on his palm so he sees our name always.

If that isn't reason enough to love and adore Him, let me tell you one more. God loved you so much that He sent His son to come and give his life so you and I might have life ... abundant, eternal life.

That life is ours right now ... it's not a future life. It doesn't begin when we die and go to heaven. It started the minute we professed our faith in him. It started at our baptism. It will continue on after our death. There is so much more to this spiritual life in Christ than what we allow ourselves to have.

I think we come to worship because we desire change. And the secret desire you have is the same desire God has for you. That desire is to be *reformed*, to be *transformed*, to be *conformed* into the spitting image of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

So be it.

© Copyright 2015. All Rights Reserved.