

The Purpose of Worship: for the Glory of God and the Good of all People

Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. (Ps. 95:6-7)

For the Glory of God...

- Involves ascribing all honor and worth to God because He is delightfully worthy. (DA Carson)
- Is God-centered, not human-centered, and overtly Trinitarian.
- Is always centered around, and saturated by, God's Word, the Bible.
- Is never merely intellectual or merely emotional, but whole-person wonder/awe at God's greatness, that "Celebrates Christ." (I Peter 1:8)

For the Good of all people...

For Yourself: "love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind..."

- Worship is meant to change you, bringing you into a larger story of what God is doing in your life. Worship may encourage you, or convict you - both are good! We worship to be changed by a powerful God in our minds (intellects), wills (choices), and affections/emotions (what moves us deeply). We don't worship because we *have* to (obligation), or only when we *want* to (feeling-driven); we worship because we desperately *need* to.
- We need to be in the presence of God - He is looking for us. Christ said to the woman at the well, "*the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.*" (Jn. 4:23)

For Others: "and love your neighbor as yourself."

- We are all pilgrims on the way of faith who need the same sustenance, care and encouragement. Worship reminds us that we are journeying together in community, not alone. Whether it is singing, affirming, praying, greeting, or inviting, we worship to increase the faith of others as well as our own.
- Scripture records the purpose of generations "gathering together" to worship (Psalm 102:18-22) The apostle Paul exhorts believers to "speak" not only "to the Lord", but also "to each other" in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph 5:19, Col 3:16).
- Worship has an evangelistic component as well. One of the easiest ways for us to witness to the world is to invite people to worship and let them see us participating! (see Acts 2, I Cor 14)

Our Patterns of Worship: Liturgy (what to expect in our services, and why)

"Retelling" the gospel story through Revelation and Response:

There is no prescribed "worship order" in Scripture; but the very structure of our liturgy is designed to reflect gospel truth, in its content and order: Within and between service elements, our liturgy repeatedly reminds us who God is and what He has done, before each congregational response of worship. (Isaiah 6 is one excellent example of this, where God reveals Himself in various ways, and Isaiah (and the angels) respond with words and acts of worship.)

Reflection of God's beauty:

Our services are neither beauty without truth (a "show"/performance) or truth without beauty (a lecture/class). Beauty, rightly used, serves the truth of the Word in our worship, just as it does in the Psalms, where craft and skill of poetry/literature are used in the service of truth and worship. The Psalmist exhorts us to sing and play "skillfully" (33:3), and "worship in the beauty of holiness" (29:2). We want truth to be combined with beauty in a way that reflects God's beauty in this world and deeply affects the whole person.

Elements often found in our services which help us re-tell the gospel and reflect God's greatness and beauty:

-Call to Worship: The call to worship gathers the people of God through a common text of Scripture, read or sung. It boldly and joyfully reminds us how great God is, and why we are here!

-Adoration: We respond to who God is and what He has done, by proclaiming His worthiness to Him- celebrating and adoring Him through Scripture reading, corporate singing, affirmations, prayer, etc.

-Scripture Reading: From the call to worship to the benediction, whether read, prayed, sung, or preached, God's Word is central throughout our worship. We read formally in each service from both the Old and New Testaments.

-Prayer: We pray corporately throughout our services, expressing adoration, invocation, confession, thanksgiving, the Lord's Prayer, intercession, etc. (Phil. 4:4-7)

-Music: Music in worship is always a *means*: it's one of the ways we worship, but not the only way, or an end in itself. We like to say MRPC has one worship "language" but different musical "dialects." Our services, by design, have many things similar, but do communicate in different musical styles. However, both "styles" always strive to communicate both God's transcendence and His immanence; and both services include elements that are deeply rooted in historic Christianity, and elements that demonstrate the relevance of the Gospel for us here and now. We also unite our services in by regularly sharing musicians and/or prepared music between venues. Lastly, even though we have various types of "prepared music" in both services, we give congregational singing top priority in our worship.

-Affirmation of Faith: Throughout the history of the church, creeds and catechisms have been used to communicate the deep truths Christians believe. These distillations of Scriptural truth connect us to the church historically and protect us from heresy, and we corporately recite and affirm them in various ways within our services.

-Confession and Assurance: We humbly acknowledge our own sin and unworthiness before God's holiness and greatness (Isaiah 6). We remind ourselves we are forgiven people, not perfect people, and because of grace we are free to admit our brokenness. Our repentance is not self-aggrandizing or showy but an honest reality that we don't have our lives together, and that God is great in his love and mercy towards us. But once we look at our sin, we always turn and look to the Grace and Peace of Christ, and boast that "Jesus paid it all." These words regularly remind us of what we so easily forget: that in Christ we are forgiven, declared righteous before God, and instead of fearing condemnation, are now adopted as children and heirs of the King!

-Offering: The offering is not "fundraising", but a Scriptural act of worship, as we joyfully give, recognizing that every good thing comes from God. Some may give online or monthly/quarterly, but we all spend this time reflecting on God's worth and His kingdom work in this world, and giving all that we are and have to God.

-Community Life and Intercessory Prayer: We communicate regularly about what we can celebrate in our lives lived together, how we connect, and ways to care for others; and this gives us an opportunity to respond to God's prodding. We then pastorally pray for God's grace to abound in the areas we highlighted.

-Sermon: Preaching is from fallible lips, but through an inerrant text. We preach using an expository approach rather than thematic; and even if a topic is being discussed we exegete the text at hand. The normal practice at MRPC is to work through books; we take breaks, however, for summer, Advent, and Easter.

-Baptism: Baptism is a sign and seal of the covenant of Grace. By it, we welcome people into the covenant where they will be covenant breakers or covenant keepers. Ultimately, the focus in baptism is not the person being baptized but God, who takes us into his arms and pours out his Spirit upon us. Baptism is a dramatic unfolding of this reality.

-Communion: Communion is a dramatic unfolding of the Passover and Last Supper. In this sacrament, we not only remember but rejoice that the presence of Christ is with us. The table is not a place of repentance, but of comfort, renewal, and celebration. It is for doubting, tempted children of the King who are longing to be reminded of, and comforted and strengthened by, God's sufficient grace. Our communion/fellowship is with God, and with each other.

-Benediction: Benediction is a blessing of "going out" or "sending forth". It is a recognition that we are leaving this place of worship but are continuing our worship outside of these physical walls until we meet again.

Your Practice of Worship (encouragement for your role in worship)

- Corporate worship on Sunday should be an overflow of your personal worship throughout the week; but Sundays are a special opportunity to gather as the Body of Christ, as we "practice" for an eternity of enjoying fellowship with God and each other. Come with eager anticipation of meeting with the Creator of the Universe, expecting that He will be at work! At the service, greet your fellow worshipers, and take a few moments to settle your heart and mind away from the things of earth and toward God.
- Worship takes work! It takes energy and focus to get past distractions and engage your mind, will, and emotions to truly worship God. Participate actively in each element of worship: sing heartily during the songs, think about and pray deeply the words you hear spoken/sung/preached, affirm truths you hear to God in your mind and heart, and evaluate your own heart as you confess to God your deep need for Him. (Psalm 66) Be aware of the worshipping congregation around you and seek to encourage them in their worship as well. What might seem distracting (a crying baby, a special needs child) may be a beautiful display of God's grace and faithfulness in someone else's life who needs God's presence in worship as much as you.
- Worship doesn't end after the Benediction. God is always near and your worship of Him can be continuous throughout the week as you anticipate the next time of refreshing encouragement with the Body of Christ.