

January 9, 2011  
Echo Hill Presbyterian Church

Psalm 145:1-13a  
Romans 12:1-2

### Worship: Our Response to God's Mighty Acts

**Introduction:** Whenever we take time to read and study scripture a good question for us to always be asking – a good thing for us to always be looking for – is what does this text say about God: about *who God is and what God does?*

The 145<sup>th</sup> Psalm – says a lot about God. It talks about God's

- Greatness
- His mighty acts, his wondrous works, his awesome deeds  
(read - creation, the ways God provides each and every day, the ways God delivers from enemies and rescues from danger)
- His goodness
- His righteousness
- His graciousness
- His mercy
- His compassion for all

The 145<sup>th</sup> Psalm – says a lot about God – who God is and what God does.

A second question that is good to bring – when ever we are reading and studying scripture is – what does this text say about us – about *who we are as human beings – about what we are to do* – how we are to live in response to this God who we encounter in scripture and most fully in the person of Jesus Christ.

The 145<sup>th</sup> Psalm says a lot about us too and how we might respond to God - who God is and what God does.

**Let us pray.**

### **Discipleship/New Members Class**

Believe it or not – in our new members’ class – or what we call ‘Exploring Discipleship Class’ – we talk very little about Echo Hill – and we don’t talk much about membership either. Instead we take time to share our faith stories – to discuss how God has been at work in our lives – how God has brought us to this place of wanting to commit ourselves to this particular community of faith that calls itself Echo Hill.

Instead we take time to remember how God has been at work in the lives of men and women throughout the ages – ordinary – everyday people – living ordinary lives – and extra-ordinary people living extra-ordinary lives.

After we take time remembering how God has claimed us as his own through the gift of faith - we talk about the fact that we are not called to be members of a particular church but called to be disciples of Jesus Christ. We talk about how disciples are those who commit themselves totally to the teachings of a particular Rabbi or teacher. (We as Christian disciples commit ourselves totally to following the teachings of Rabbi Jesus).

Being a disciple of Jesus, I remind us, is about more than knowing what Rabbi Jesus teaches – it is living how Rabbi Jesus lives.

I remind us that in committing to join us (Echo Hill) what we are committing ourselves to is living out our discipleship in the midst of this particular community – a community that will nurture, encourage, share, discipline and journey with us as fellow disciples (followers of Jesus).

I ask people to recommit themselves not only to following Jesus as disciples but to 5 practices that are instrumental in nurturing – forming – maturing us as disciples. These 5 practices are 1) Weekly Worship, 2) Daily Prayer, 3) Regular Bible Study, 4) Generous giving, 5) Service in the church and beyond.

As we begin this New Year we are going to take the next 5 weeks to look at worship. What is worship? Why do we do what we do in worship? How does worship form us as disciples of Jesus? What is our part in worship?

The place we are going to start today is with the question *what is worship?*

What I want you to do is to take a few moments to talk to those around you about the question *'what is worship?'*

Responses.

### **What is worship?**

Let me say a few precursory things about worship.

First – When we are talking about worship in its broadest sense we find that worship can be both *corporate or communal* (This is the group of people who gather together to worship. This is what we are doing this morning.) *and it can be individual*. A woman standing alone at the kitchen

sink washing her dishes might engage in an act of worship as she looks out over the beauty of the day and offers thanks.

Secondly – *Worship is not Sabbath*. The 4th of the 10 Commandments says that we are to remember the Sabbath Day, and to keep it holy. Here the context of holy is not sacred in the sense that the Sabbath Day is to be worshipped – but holy is about being ‘set apart’ for a particular reason.

In their book *Reformed Worship*, Howard Rice and James Huffstutler say this about Israel’s understanding of Sabbath during the first century.

*“Israel understood the Sabbath to rooted in creation itself, (remember how God creates in 6 days and on the 7<sup>th</sup> day God rests?) a part of God’s gracious provision for humankind. (Exod. 20:8-11) Thus, to remember the Sabbath was to pause from labor as God did, to restrain greed and give thanks for what God has provided. Sabbath also had a diaconal function (teaching). (Deut. 5:12-15) ....”*

Diaconal function was that of remembering what God had done and what God had promised to do.

Keeping the Sabbath is about setting aside time from our regular routines and activities in order both experience the graciousness of the God who gives us all things and to remember all that God has done and promises to do.

Our corporate worship is a practice that finds itself placed in our historical Sabbath (on the first day of the week – or the day of resurrection – or Sunday) because together – as a community of faith – as God’s children – it is a way of our remembering and therefore keeping Sabbath.

So, worship can be either corporate or individual – and we cannot confuse worship with Sabbath – (worship can happen any time and any place) – while at the same time worship can be an important part of Sabbath keeping. But these things don’t really help us with the real question – ‘What is worship’?

### **What is worship??**

Let me suggest that worship is most simply our response to God’s presence all around us – God’s work in creation and provision – to God’s claim on us in Jesus Christ.

Worship is our response to God’s mighty acts!

God initiates worship. God acts and we respond. The Psalmist begins his ‘Psalm of worship’ this morning by declaring that he will extol (lift up with praise) and bless his God and King – because he knows a God whose:

greatness is un-searchable

acts are mighty

works are wondrous

deeds are awesome

goodness is abundant

graciousness, mercy and steadfast love is abounding  
compassion is for all

God acts and we respond

God initiates worship by acting:

**In creation** – by making a world a universe that proclaims his presence, his goodness, his creative power. (Have you ever been awed by the majesty of a mountain range? Ever been blown away by the dawning of new day? Been left breathless by beauty? Or been left speechless by the miracle and mystery of life?)

God initiates worship by acting:

**In his providence:** Providence is a fancy word for the ways that God provides for us. God does provide – the substance of life – the simple necessities – food, air, and water – shelter – clothes – community – joy. (God provides for us by giving us good minds with which to think, able bodies with which to work, tools to increase our productivity, markets with which to sell our wares.)

God initiates worship by acting:

**In his calling of a people:** The worship of God is meant for those who belong to God – and while it is true that we warmly welcome others into our worship – worship is means

of grace through which God communes with those He has called to be his own people. – Through the work of the Spirit God calls and claims those he has chosen to be a part of his family in Jesus Christ.

God initiates worship by acting:

**In salvations:** God's redeeming act in Jesus' death on a cross 'for us and for our salvation' and in the triumph an Easter morning resurrection – God seals for us the promise of an eternal life.

### **God initiates and our response in worship.**

The Psalmist in our reading this morning responds to what God has done by calling people to worship by:

Lifting God up in praise  
 By speaking well of God's name  
 By standing in awe of God's works  
 By declaring God's mighty acts  
 By Celebrating God's goodness  
 By singing of God's righteousness  
 By Giving thanks to God  
 By blessing God  
 'Letting the world know of God's power for good' (The Message)

The funny thing is that as the Psalmist calls us to respond to God's might acts – there is nothing there about us sitting around in our worship being promised some kind of spiritual goodies. Nothing here about leaving feeling good or up lifted.

In fact if you look at what the Psalmist says here you would think that worship was a verb – something that we did – something that required action on our part – and not a noun – a place that we went.

In fact – if we took what we heard to heart we might think that worship is not a spectators’ sport – it is not coming to take in a good show (Oh wasn’t the music simply beautiful. Oh wasn’t the oratory of the pastor eloquent.) Instead worship calls us out of our seats and out of the stands and calls us to come onto the field - where we are expected to participate in every play.

The funny thing – and this may surprise us – our worship is all about God and nothing about us.

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Huge Oliphant Old laments in his book, Worship: Reformed according to Scripture,

*‘that we are often told and have come to believe that we should worship because it brings us happiness – or a sense of self-fulfillment – or in order to build solidarity (‘The family that prays together stays together.’) – or in order that we might be blessed with riches or good health or peace of mind ... These things may sometimes be true – but “true worship, ..., is distinguished from all of these in that it serves, above all else, the praise of God’s glory”’. (Paraphrased and quoted from pg. 2)*

It is Old’s comments that maybe bring us to the heart of what worship is – worship is service. The word that is often translated as ‘worship’ in both the original languages of the Old and New Testament (the

Hebrew *boda* and Greek ‘*latreia*’) has a sense of ‘service’. Not just any kind of service but the service or labor performed by slaves or hired servants.

Worship is our service of God – it is us serving God.

The three things that I want you take away from this morning’s sermon is:

- 1) Worship is our response to God’s mighty acts. God initiates our worship through his creative, providential, covenantal, and redemptive acts.
- 2) Worship is verb that requires us to act – to do things – to offer prayer and praise, thanksgiving and confession, standing and silence, listening and thinking, singing, lifting our hands and our hearts – offering ourselves in service to the one who has given us everything.
- 3) Worship (corporate worship) is a practice that forms us spiritually – that transforms us as followers of Jesus – disciples. In our serving of God through our worship – we learn and become people who are living as the servant Lord who calls us to follow – Jesus – lived.