

A String of Pearls

Sourcesheet 1: Arrivals

When you come to church you might be in a worshipping mood. On the other hand, you might be in a bit of a rush - perhaps the family has not been quite up in time, or you overslept, or burned the toast... some weeks it is just enough simply to get to church at all!

This may not be the way to think of worship. Getting to church on time is, perhaps, not the best way to approach it.

The opening parts of the service are intended to encourage us to bring to God what is going on in our lives, and we begin with a greeting.

There are many greetings in the letters of the New Testament which show something of the relationship between the writer and the readers (or hearers, the letters were very often read out in the churches). For example:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, 5 for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind

(1 Corinthians 1: 3-5)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

(Galatians 1: 3-5)

May grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

(2 Peter 1: 2)

(Look also at 2 John 1: 3, 1Tim 1:2, 2 Peter 1: 2)

In the same way that the opening of the letter reveals a relationship between the writer and the recipients, the opening to our worship sets up a relationship between the leader and the rest of the congregation. The letter writers encouraged their recipients in their Christian lives. Worship is an opportunity for the members of the congregation to engage with God for themselves and to share this engagement with others as a group of disciples.

We talk quite often of worship *leaders* though this is differently understood in the various services of the Anglican Church and more dramatically so in other denominations. Worship can be seen as a pathway along which we need to be guided, or it could be seen as an expression of praise to God which is enabled, or it could be understood as a celebration of communal faith which needs to be catalysed. It may be a number of other possibilities, there are so many versions of leadership that it makes us wonder if the term *leader* is the right one to use.

The prayer of preparation connects the individual worshippers and God. It starts with God and ourselves, then invokes the Holy Spirit, finally ending up with the lordship of Christ. The prayer has several important themes:

We are to come to worship as openly as we can -

...pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.
(Matthew 6:6)

The Holy Spirit is our partner in worship -

... the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.
(Romans 8:26)

The love of God is an essential part of worship and, as we shall see, an equally essential consequence of worship -

We love because he first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.
(1 John 4:19-20)

Bearing all this in mind we are now into the full swing of the service and hopefully ready for the next part where we reflect on how our relationship with God and those with whom we share this world has been over recent days.

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Talksheet 1—Arrivals

Psalm 122

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WELCOME – Breaking the ice (Aim for 10 mins)

Psalm 100

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.

Know that the Lord is God.
It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise.
Give thanks to him, bless his name.

For the Lord is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.

To start the session read Psalm 100 together.

After a moments' stillness read it again and
think especially of the line —
Enter his gates with thanksgiving.

**When you come to worship how do you
'enter the gates'?**

**Is it with thanksgiving and/or something
else?**

Is it the same every week?

WORD – Applying the truth (Aim for 45 mins)

In our time, it's a common notion that worship—and indeed, religion itself—is a personal and private thing. Certainly worship must come from one's own heart, and we can indeed praise God in solitude. But the Bible teaches that God is pleased by worship which occurs *together*. In community. Any family has a traditional, meaningful place to gather: at the dinner table or around the Christmas tree. God's family is no different. The Psalms have much to say about the people of God coming together to praise him.

1. Describe a worship service which you remember as being particularly meaningful to you.
2. Read Psalm 122. How would you summarize the emotions and concerns of the psalmist?
3. What references to community can you find throughout this psalm?
4. How does the psalmist feel about worship in verse 1?

What effect does anticipation have on our worship experience?

5. Jerusalem, location of the temple, was synonymous with worship. Is it important to have a special place of worship (v2)? Why or why not?
6. In verse 4 the tribes are commanded “to go up.....to praise the name of the LORD.” Why, in your opinion, would this be a *command*?
7. Should we worship when we don’t feel motivated to do so? Explain.
8. The psalmist admonishes his listeners to “pray for the peace of Jerusalem” in verse 6. What effect does such “secular” prayer have on our worship?
9. The psalmists worship is completed in verse 9 with a promise. How is this decision an appropriate response to being in God’s presence?
10. What aspects of our community worship can you enhance this week?

WITNESS – Reaching out to others

(Aim for 20 – 30 minutes)

Giving Thanks to God

Thank God for something that helps you to praise God.

Praying for one another

Ask everyone to share something they would like prayer for.

Then go round the room and pray for the person to your right,

Praying for those who don’t yet know God

Pray for an opportunity to show God’s love, joy and peace this week as you go about your ordinary everyday life.