



“Passionate Worship”

Texts: 2 Samuel 6:9-22, Psalm 100

a sermon by the Rev. Anna von Winckler

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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - EVANSVILLE, INDIANA

How did you enter church this morning? I don't mean by which door, but how was your attitude when you came in? Did you enter out of habit? Or because your spouse expects you to come with them? Or because you want to set an example for your children? Or, did you come out of a desire to meet God in this place? To encounter the Living God who gives life and meaning to our lives?

A couple of weeks ago, I spoke on how we worship with our lives, our deeds; you can even say that we worship with our attitude. In Psalm 100 we are told to be joyful. Be Joyful! It seems that it can be difficult to be joyful these days with endless bad news. Anxiety seems to be the prevailing attitude, not joy. And, yet, it is Joy that we are called to. Be Joyful in the Lord. And really, isn't that the only way to be joyful these days, through the Lord? In God we find our peace and our sense of being. In God we can find joy, because the rest of it is just noise trying to distract us from the eternal, which is God and the joy that comes from knowing God.

In looking at the 2 Samuel passage, we see that David found joy in God. It tells us that David and all of Israel were celebrating with all their might. They celebrated God with joy and with all their might. Do we celebrate being in God's presence with all of our might? When we enter into this building on Sunday mornings, we should try to leave distractions at the door and focus on who it is we've come to be with. What a difference worship could be if we came with an attitude of Joy and

Celebration. And it also adds that David was celebrating with music, with tambourines, cymbals, and lyres. I can just imagine the loudness of that music with tambourines and cymbals being a part of it, but, as this congregation is especially aware of, music often connects us to the Spirit, through the loud clanging of cymbals, but also at times through the soft, deep notes. God comes to us in music.

Another aspect of worship that David did was to dance before the Lord. I know that is a hard idea for staid Presbyterians to think about, especially in a church like this with many who come from a more charismatic background. Celebrating with hands raised and dancing in worship might bring up all sorts of negative connotations, but in places like Africa dancing while singing is part of the worship. Sometimes when they were doing special offerings, like a thanksgiving offering, people would dance down the aisle to place their offering into the plate - a worshipful dance in which I saw the joy and the gratitude that we hear spoken of in these scriptures. As we set our minds on passionate worship this week, what do we need to do to experience that passion when we come to worship? I think it starts with our attitude and expectation when we come to worship. It is not just about what happens during the service, the hymns chosen, the music Rob plays or the choir sings, the liturgy or the sermon, but it is first about what we ourselves bring to worship.

And so, I'd like us to think for a moment about how we construct our worship services. We start with a Call to Worship. And that is what we are called to do - to worship God. We are called to focus our spirits on God. One way we do that is through confession, to repent from our wrong way of living, so that we can be open to God's Spirit having now been forgiven. I've mentioned the music and the prayer of confession, but we also have the prayers of the people, coming together as one to pray for each other, for this church, and for all the needs of the world. It reminds us that we are part of a family and that we need to be mindful of the needs of all. That is why it is important to me that that prayer include other Presbyterian churches as well as prayers for people in other parts of the country and in the world who are in need of God's comfort and peace. Praying for others moves us beyond ourselves and reminds us that we need to be concerned, be involved in interceding for those who are in need. If we just pray for those within our congregation we lose sight of our

connectedness with others even those in other parts of the world. I love World Communion Sunday for precisely that reason, but we shouldn't remember our brothers and sisters who live with unbelievable challenges just on the first Sunday in October.

And then there is the Sermon. I think I've mentioned before how I never wanted to be a preaching pastor. It was never something I felt called to or, perhaps, I lacked confidence having grown up in a church that had a fantastic preaching pastor. I've been blessed to have been able to worship in churches with some phenomenal preachers, but in the end I felt God telling me that I needed to only be faithful to God in preaching; to preach what I felt God putting upon my heart to say. It was then between God and each person to have my words, as good or poorly spoken, to bring life to the person hearing.

In my first church in Florida I had an Elder come to me just irate. She couldn't take my preaching any longer. She said she never left the service feeling "happy" and that she should be leaving the service feeling "happy". I told her that if she wasn't happy, then perhaps she should reflect on what she had heard and what was making her unhappy; that perhaps God was trying to teach her something through her unhappiness. While I agreed that she shouldn't be unhappy every week, I wasn't sure how I could even change how I preached and, even if I could, I'm not sure I would want to. Would I be a faithful pastor if I only preached what the congregation wanted to hear and not what I felt God calling me to preach?

In seminary I took a social justice class. During a discussion on the distribution of wealth and the lack of care and concern with some with great means for those without, a few students who had come from wealthy congregations got very defensive and said that even the rich needed to be ministered to. The professor agreed that they did need to be ministered to by pastors who didn't sell out and preach only what the congregation wanted to hear. If they preached while forsaking the hard words of Jesus that challenges the status quo and calls out people like the rich young ruler to give of his riches to the poor, then they would be selling their souls for status and influence, rather than being faithful to the gospel message.

And, one more thought on sermons. In high school my home church hired a new associate pastor whose preaching style was very different from the senior pastor. While the senior pastor's

preaching was very dynamic, the associate pastor's preaching was more low key. I remember hearing a discussion of some about how boring the associate pastor was and that they got nothing out of his sermons. I loved the associate pastor's sermons. I still remember some of his sermons to this day. But the difference was that with the senior pastor, he would underline the points he wanted you to especially key into through pauses, inflection, the loudness or softness with which he delivered each word. With the associate pastor you had to listen, really listen to hear the rich words of wisdom the Spirit spoke through his sermons. Are you listening to God speaking to you through the sermons, even if the delivery isn't as dynamic as you are accustomed to?

And then we have the offering. We are told in the 2 Samuel passage that David gave the sacrifice of the bull and the fatted calf, which he gave out of love for God - not out of duty or requirement, but out of his joy for God.

Finally we end our service with a sending forth and with a blessing. Go and do now that you have heard God speak to you. Go and do now that you have been renewed through your worship of God. Go and do, making disciples of all whom you meet.

Passionate worship comes from our hearts, from our love of God, from our expectation to encounter God through our worship. It comes from giving ourselves over in our worship through our joy, the music, the hearing of God's word and even through dancing. We do this because, as Psalm 100 says, we know the Lord is God and God has made us; we are God's people. So give thanks to God and call upon God's name for the Lord is good, and whose steadfast love is everlasting; and whose faithfulness endures forever.



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