

This Sunday's texts:

Psalm 147:1-12

Romans 12:1-8

Matthew 5:13-16

**Lifestyle of Grace: Community**

**Pastor Joe Hill**

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The Gospel reading for this morning is from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 5, verses 13 through 16:

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on a stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven

This is the Word of the Lord. Good morning. It's great to see you all here on this day that feels earlier than it technically is. Today, we're continuing in our Lifestyle of Grace series that we're going through this Lent, where we are exploring how God's grace changes everything. We're digging deep into how the Christian life isn't something that we live out of moral obligation or is a way to show that we are worthy of the sacrifice of Jesus, but rather something that we live out of the abundance of what God has so freely given us.

A verse that's stuck out to me, as I thought about this series, is from Romans 4:4-5, "to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. But to the one who doesn't work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness." To me, this is the heart of the Lifestyle of Grace series. We don't earn God's love like a wage. We receive it like a gift. And because it is already ours as God's free gifts to us, we can live in freedom and for the glory of the One who loves us.

So today, we are looking at how the lifestyle of Grace is a lifestyle of worship. As we do so, we'll be looking primarily at our text from Romans 12 today. My hope for this message is that you would get two things out of it. The first is that it would expand your understanding of what worship is and the second is that it would put God's grace and our works in their proper place in the Christian life.

So as I get started today, I'm actually excited because I get to deal with one of my pet projects as a pastor, dealing with something that I call "church words." Church words, according to myself, are words that we use in a church setting or in

a broader Christian culture that we know how to use in a sentence, but if you had to write down the dictionary definition, you might struggle a little bit. Today, I want to tell you that I think that “worship” is a church word. What is worship? According to one theological dictionary I read through this week, worship is the odd response to the saving acts and praiseworthy character of God. To put it simply, worship is our response to God's Grace. It is us honoring and proclaiming the glory of the God who loves and saves us.

Yet I think that something unfortunate has happened to worship or at least to our understanding of worship in the modern church. I think that it is gone from our “odd response to the saving acts and praiseworthy character of God” and it has become the songs we sing in church. We have this understanding that worship and singing in church are the same thing. Now we can worship through song. That's part of it, but that's not the whole thing.

We all know very well that not all singing is worship. If Bill and the choir got up after my sermon and sang “Eye of the Tiger” for you this morning, you would know that something was amiss. But the thing we might not always think about is that not all worship is singing. Two problems arise from this misunderstanding. The first is that when we think of worship as primarily singing, it narrows our feeling of who can worship. Worship is for people who are good singers and I just kind of stand there. I've heard it from so many people over the years who feel a little uncomfortable in “worship” because they're uncomfortable with their voice. I've heard it so many times and I want you to know today that it is not true. God knows exactly how good your singing voice is. He made your vocal cords and he loves to hear you sing. He loves to hear your praises.

It's like this. My daughter Avery draws a lot of pictures and she gave me this one the other day. I've talked a bit in my household about how I haven't really even made much time to put some art on my office walls. I just kind of hit the ground running when I started here. So Avery gave this to me and she said, “Daddy, I drew you this picture and you can put it on the wall in your office.” So I brought it to church with me and I love this picture. It's a little *Cat in the Hat* coloring page. I love it not because of how impeccably she draws in the lines or because I think that it deserves its own place at the Louvre, maybe the Museum of Modern Art, but that's another topic altogether. I love this picture because my daughter drew it for me. God doesn't love your worship through song because of



how good of a singer any of us are. He loves it because you're His child and He is your heavenly Father. So please don't think that you need to be timid with your worship or timid with your praise because you're uncomfortable with your singing voice. God loves it.

There's another thing. I think sometimes we're uncomfortable singing because we think other people might judge us. I want you to know that there's not a person here today who is in the business of judging anybody else's worship and at the end of the day, whether they are or not, their opinion does not matter. I heard a story from a pastor a few years back who said that they had sung a new hymn in service one morning. As somebody was coming out of service, they said "You know pastor, I really didn't like that new song we sang today." He said, "Yeah, that's okay because it wasn't for you." Right? That's why Psalm 98:4 says, "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praises." He says to make a joyful and a loud noise, not a beautiful one. That is not the qualifier. One of the problems that can arise when we think of worship primarily as singing is that we get hung up with feeling like our talent has something to do with our praise.

The second issue is this. It is a terribly narrow understanding of what worship is. When we think of singing as the only way to worship, we miss out on the joy that comes with knowing that we can glorify and lift up the name of Jesus in everything we do, not because we have to, but because we can, we're invited to, and He is worthy of it. That is what today's text in Romans is all about. It says, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship."<sup>1</sup>

Now, this is something I want you to hear today. Before you ever try and "do" anything for God, first remember what He is done for you. Jesus went to the cross and He rose from the grave for you. He gave His life for His enemies, for those who didn't deserve it, for those who were against Him, for those who abandoned Him. He did not think, as those nails were hammered into His hands and His feet, of whether any of us were worthy of the sacrifice. In fact, He did it because He knew we never could be. No matter how hard we try in this life, we will never earn the great cost that Jesus paid for our forgiveness.

The great thing about the Gospel of Jesus is that we do not have to because the grace of God always makes the first move. It comes to you. You don't have to reach for it because we have a God who pursues the one who goes astray. He

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 12:1

doesn't open up the door to the sheep pen for the wayward sheep and shout out directions, "Here is what you have to do to make it back home." He doesn't give you a list of things you have to do to earn your place in His kingdom. Rather, He goes out and He picks you up in His arms and He carries you home. This is the God we worship. We worship because of who he is and what He has done.

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship." Our text today says that worship is so much more than just songs in church. It is offering our bodies as a living sacrifice. It is a way of life. It's a way of life that understands that what we do and how we live are not about earning God's favor, but about bringing Him glory. That's what Matthew 5:16 says, "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." It's worship and our worship is our witness. It points others toward the God who is loving, just, and gracious. It shines a light in a world full of darkness. It suggests to a lost, hurting, and broken world that there is, in fact, a great Hope.

When we live in view of God's mercy, that is, when we live with our eyes fixed on Christ, on what He has done for us, on who He is, and on who He says we are, we can live a life free of the burden of trying to prove that we are worthy of love. You don't need to spend yourself earning God's favor. Child of God, you already have it. We live then to show the love and glory of God to the world. That is how we live for God, without living to try and earn God's love. And that is a lifestyle of worship.

When we gather together and sing about the glory and greatness of God, to praise and honor Him in this place, that is worship. As we connect with one another in community and fellowship, that is worship. When you pray for your brothers and sisters in Christ, that is worship. As you use the gifts that God has given you to serve and build up the body of Christ, that is worship. And when you serve outside of the four walls of this building, that's worship too. And when you really want to give it to that person who cut you off in traffic, but you hold your tongue and move on, that is worship too. The way you do your job, the way you treat the checker at the grocery store, the way you interact with your neighbors, the way you treat your classmates, the way you respond to the people who treat you poorly in this world, that is worship. All of these things you can do to honor and glorify God, "to shine your light before others, so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven."

As the sermon closes today and we enter into worship through song, I encourage you to join in with all of God's creation in making a joyful noise to the Lord. In the scripture, it says that people often take a posture of praise. They raise their hands. They get down on their knees. I tell you that you could dance too, but I don't want to scare anyone because I know this is a Lutheran Church. So baby steps after all, right?

It's not just what we sing. As you go today, my hope for you is that this idea of a lifestyle of worship sticks with you, that you wouldn't just sing for God's praise, but that you would *live* for it. As you go into the different spaces, the different relationships, the different places you go in this life, you would do so with the question on your mind and in your heart "how can I glorify my God here?" The lifestyle of Grace is a lifestyle of worship, a life lived in view of the great mercy of God, each and every day and in each and every situation living out our odd response to the saving acts and praiseworthy deeds of our God.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, it blows me away that You would see the offerings of people like us as something that even though You are mighty, You are holy, and You are perfect, You could see that the way that Your people praise You, would honor and glorify You. God, it blows me away. So, Lord, I pray that we as Your people would not see or feel that worship is an obligation, but an incredible invitation to proclaim and live out the goodness that You have shown us. Lord, we dwell on Your love and it draws us to You in praise. In Jesus' name. Amen.