

“BACK TO SCHOOL: I - WORSHIP 101”

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Elkton United Methodist Church

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Isaiah 6:1-8

Matthew 26:26-30

I begin this morning by saying “Thank you!” Thank you for coming to worship today. Thank you. You could be a thousand different places this morning. You could be sleeping in on what is probably your only true day off all week. You could be relaxing at home in your pj’s reading the Sunday newspaper and enjoying another cup of coffee. Or you could be out shopping, or cleaning your house, or on the golf course. Like I said, you could be a thousand different places this morning, yet you are here, and I thank you.

You have figured out something that many others haven’t - that being in this place for at least this hour means a lot - to you, to others, and to God. It is an hour in which we say by our presence that there is more to life than meets the eye, that life is filled with deep meaning and depth, and behind it all is God. It is a sacred time, when we intentionally gather together to focus on God and God’s blessings and God’s guidance. It is a time that grounds us, that focuses us, that centers us and strengthens us for all of our days. It is a time and a place where we remember that we are never alone - because we have God, and because we have each other. So we leave this place every week stronger than when we came.

We praise and we sing and we listen and we pray - and through it all, the Spirit of God flows in us and through us and among us. With people throughout the centuries who have gathered to worship, we heed the call of I Peter, chapter 2, verse 9, which says: “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.”

That is, indeed, why we worship, because He has called out of darkness into His wonderful light - and He continues to do so every day, and in grateful thanksgiving, we come to worship Him.

So thank you for coming to worship today. And thank you, ahead of time, for listening to a different kind of sermon - today and for the next three weeks. This month’s sermons are what I’m calling “teaching sermons,” and it won’t take long for you to understand why. Today, I’ll be teaching you about the fundamentals of our worship.

You know, I have taught youth confirmation classes for 26 years now, and

every year I teach a session to the youth on worship. And every year, when I do, I tell them that they're learning things that I would estimate that probably 75% of the adults in the church do not know. Just some fundamentals about worship. Now, it's not your fault that you don't know them. Probably no one thought to teach you about them. Or you might not have grown up in church, or you might have grown up in another denomination. I learned many of these things in confirmation class right here in this church way back in 1968 - and I've never forgotten them.

So it's back to school this morning, and as your teacher of the morning, I'm going to ask you to do what all good teachers do - take out what you'll need for class today - and that is, your bulletin, the insert in the bulletin entitled "Worship 101," perhaps something with which to write, and the red United Methodist hymnal.

Okay - let's get started.

The first thing we're going to talk about is - why we do what we do. Sometimes people ask me why our order of worship is always basically the same. Of course, every week the hymns change, and seasonally other things change, like the responses, but basically, other than that, our order of worship remains the same.

And there is a reason for that. It's Biblical. We actually heard about it in the first lesson this morning - the lesson from Isaiah. Let's revisit it for a moment. Isaiah writes about his call from the Lord, and it begins with him seeing the Lord sitting on His throne. Angels are attending him, and by the language we hear that they are approaching Him with humility - covering their faces - and they are praising Him - "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." There is also the awesomeness of shaking thresholds and smoky mists.

Then Isaiah, in the face of God's glory, realizes his sinfulness, and he confesses it before the Lord, after which he is forgiven. And then, as one who is forgiven and set free, he answers God's call, "whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" with "Here am I, Lord, send me."

In those eight brief verses, come the historic pattern for Christian worship. Christians for centuries have based their worship on this passage from Isaiah. And in your bulletin this morning, you'll see that we inserted section titles to explain this pattern of worship.

"We gather and praise," "we hear the Word," "we respond to the Word," and "we go forth into the world." It follows the pattern of the Isaiah passage. So for us, from the time we enter this space, through our opening time of greeting and

prayer, singing and call to worship, and prayer of confession - that is the time of gathering and praise.

The next major section is “hearing the Word” - and that includes the word offered by our musicians, the Word read by the members of our church, and the Word preached.

Everything after that in the service is our response to the Word. We offer our prayers in response to what we’ve heard, we give our offering in response to what we’ve heard, on communion Sundays, we receive communion as a response to the Word, and on baptism Sundays, we baptize as a response to the Word. We also do announcements as a response to the Word. I mention that, because sometimes people suggest that I do the announcements at the very beginning of the worship service, so as not to disrupt the flow of worship. I don’t do that, because the announcements are all about ways for people to respond to the Word they’ve just heard. They are as much a part of worship as anything else.

And finally, the last section, is “going forth into the world.” Just as Isaiah answered God’s call to go into the world for Him, so do we as we leave this place. We sing a closing hymn, we hear the benediction, and then we clasp hands to remember that we don’t go out into the world alone, that we go together with our loved ones here in this place.

So that’s why we do what we do.

Secondly, I want us to look at how our church year is organized. Every week you see in the bulletin near the top what week it is - for instance, this week you see that it is the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost - and actually, I remind you of that in the greeting every week. But do you know what that means? Or do you know why the colors of the paraments and my vestments sometimes change? Well, if you don’t, you will in a few minutes.

Turn, if you will, to the chart on the Worship 101 insert you found in your bulletin this morning.

Our year is divided up into seasons based on events in Jesus’ life. There are six seasons, and the first season of the year, rightly so, is Advent, because it is the season during which we look toward the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. Each season has a color - and Advent’s season is purple, which is the color of royalty - signifying the coming King. It is 4 Sundays long - and as you know, we mark that by lighting candles on an Advent wreath for each of those four Sundays. And the reason we celebrate Advent is anticipating the birth of our Lord and Savior.

Next, of course, is Christmas, as we celebrate the birth of Jesus. The colors are white and gold, signifying purity for white, and the highest value of all in gold.

You might be surprised to see there that the season of Christmas lasts twelve days, because most people think Christmas is just one day. But the writer of the Christmas carol, "The Twelve Days of Christmas" actually had it right. Christmas lasts for 12 days, until the Feast of the Epiphany.

The Feast Day of Epiphany is actually January 6<sup>th</sup>, but we celebrate Epiphany on the Sunday closest to that. The color for Epiphany is green, which is reminiscent of the evergreen - always there, always growing, always living. During Epiphany, we remember the revelation of Jesus Christ - the revealing of who He is in His baptism, and in the visit of the Wise Men, symbolizing that Jesus came for all people, not just the chosen ones. The length of the season of Epiphany varies from year to year, depending on when Ash Wednesday falls.

Ash Wednesday is the first day of the next season, which is Lent. Lent, once again, is marked by the color purple, the color of royalty, the color of the King of glory who shed His blood for us. Lent lasts for 40 days, but those 40 days do not include the Sundays. Sundays are considered mini-resurrection days, so they're not really counted, so if you really counted all the days during the Lenten seasons it would be 46 or 47. During Lent, we walk with Jesus on His journey to the cross. As you know, it is a solemn, penitential season when we remember the price He paid for our sins. Lent goes all the way up to Holy Week - which includes Palm/Passion Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

Next, of course, is Easter, the day of resurrection! The colors again, as with Christmas, are white and gold, and we celebrate Jesus' victory over the grave. Let me go back for a minute, and explain one further thing. Easter takes place on the first Sunday after the first full moon of the spring equinox. So once you figure that out you count back from Easter 40 days plus Sundays and you know when Ash Wednesday falls (and Epiphany ends).

The Easter season lasts for 50 fifty, and leads into Pentecost (which if you think about it, makes sense) - the root of Pentecost is pente - which means 5. So Pentecost is 50 days after Easter, and it is the day that the Spirit descended and the church was born. The color for Pentecost is red, which is the color of fire - which is a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

So that's how our year is organized - it's a way to journey with Jesus every year through all the times of His life. It keeps us focused on Him in subtle and not so subtle ways.

Okay, moving on now, turn over your Worship 101 sheet and you'll see my attempt at drawing a picture of our worship space. You know, all of us come into this place every week without really knowing a lot about it. So, here's your opportunity to learn what each part is called. If you have something with which to

write, get it know, because I'll go through the chart with you.

A - of course, is the pews on which you sit.

B - are the aisles down which we walk.

C - is the choir loft, which we're delighted to have filled again this morning!  
Welcome back, choir!

D - is the organ which our fabulously talented Sharon plays!

E - and E is the piano she also plays!

F - is this - the pulpit. It's the place where worship is led, the Word is read,  
and the sermon in preached.

G - is the altar or communion table. In some churches, this area in the front  
is split - and the pulpit is off to the side and the altar is up against the back wall.

H - is the Christ candle, which we light every week as a visual reminder that  
the light of Christ is with us always.

I - is the baptismal font. It is the place where we put the water and bless it  
before we baptize persons into the life of faith and the life of the church, and  
promise to be with them as they grow in the faith. As you know, if you've been  
here any length of time, in the United Methodist Church, we baptize infants.  
Other churches do not - they practice what is called "believer's baptism" - where,  
when a person is old enough to make their own decision, they chose to be baptized.  
We believe in infant baptism, based upon the passage in Acts where it says that  
Philip and all of his household were baptized, which, of course, included infants and  
children. And we also practice infant baptism, because of Jesus' words, "let the  
children come unto me, do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of  
God."

Back to the chart. J - is called the chancel rail, or some call it the  
communion rail. It surrounds K - which is the chancel area. So why is there a  
rail? Well, yes, it's a place to kneel for communion and prayer, but its origins are  
far different from that. The chancel area used to be a place where only clergy could  
go. That was based on the Biblical idea of the "holy of holies" - the place in the  
temple where only the priests could go. So that area (the nave) was for laypeople,  
and this area, beyond the chancel rail was just for clergy. It was sacred and  
special, and no one but clergy could go there. That is still the case in some  
orthodox churches today. No one but priests can go into the chancel area, and very  
often there is an ornate screen to mark the dividing line.

Clearly, that is not the case in our church anymore. All people are welcome in the chancel area, and in my estimation, make this a richer place because of it. So K is the chancel area.

L - The whole section of everything between the chancel area and the back is called the nave, or the sanctuary. Nave comes from the word for ship, which signifies we're on a journey, and sanctuary means a place of refuge and safety - both of which are lovely images for the place we sit for worship, aren't they?

Two more - M is the narthex. Many people refer to it as the foyer, but it's actually called the narthex - the gateway between the outside world and the sanctuary.

And finally, N is actually behind me, it's called the sacristy. Many people think of it as the little kitchen behind the sanctuary, but it's actually the sacristy - and as the name implies, it's a place where sacred things are stored and prepared - things we use in worship. So the paraments are stored in the sacristy, baptism and communion are prepared in the sanctuary, and the candles are kept there as well.

Before I go on, let me say a word about our other sacrament - holy communion. The first, of course, was baptism. We have only two sacraments in the United Methodist church - as opposed to up to seven in other denominations. We have two because these are the two that Jesus took part in in the Bible.

In the United Methodist church, we believe that the bread and wine (or in our case grape juice) signify the body and blood of Christ. Other churches believe they are the body and blood of Christ. For us, they are powerful symbols of Jesus' sacrifice of love on our behalf.

Our table is open to all who believe in Him, not just members, and it is also open to children, which people have asked me about before. We open our table to children because, once again, Jesus wanted nothing to keep children away from him, and even though they may not fully understand what it means, do we really either? None of us really do - it's a divine mystery.

And it is also a means of grace, through which God works in our lives. So we invite all to the table of our Lord, in the United Methodist Church.

Okay - on to the tools of our worship. Mainly, they are two. The Bible and the United Methodist hymnals. We're going to be delving more deeply into the Bible in a couple of weeks with Bible 101, so for now let's turn our attention to the hymnal - the red one, because you will be astounded to see what a rich and

wonderful resource it is for our worship.

Just a few pages in, on Roman numeral page 7, you'll find John Wesley's Directions for Singing. Take some time to read it some day - it will make you smile, but it will also make you think, and hopefully make you lift your voice in song, as he says "Lustily and with good courage."

The next several pages are all the basic services of the church, regular worship, communion, and baptism. Then we come to the hymns, starting on page 57. Before we look at the hymn page, let me show you some other things. The hymnal is divided into some major sections. You'll see at the top of 57 on the left, the words, "The glory of the Triune God." Well, as you go through the hymnal, that changes. It goes like this - God first, then hymns about Christ, then hymns about the Holy Spirit. Then hymns about grace, the church, and the coming kingdom. So those are the major sections.

On the other corner, it tells you the kind of hymn it is. So if you're looking for a praise hymn, there you go! If you flip through the hymnal, that corner of the page basically tells you the theme of the hymn.

Let me skip for a minute to the back of the hymn - to the indexes, particularly starting on page 914. The indexes in the hymnal are amazing - they are really helpful. First, there is an index of composers, arrangers, etc. So if you want to sing a hymn by Charles Wesley, say, you can turn here and find out all the hymns he wrote.

The next two indexes are really helpful to those of us planning worship - because they are indexes of scripture. So today I was preaching on Isaiah 6:1-8, so all I had to do was turn to page 925 in the index and find the hymns that speak to that lesson, one of which I chose for our last hymn today.

The next index is the metrical index, which I'll get to in a minute. The one after that is an index of tune names. Every time a composer writes a musical tune, he or she has to name it, and here is the list of tune names. You might flip through there and see if there's a tune named after you. You might be surprised to find your name there - don't forget to check the saints section! (By the way, there is no hymn tuned named Karen, and there is no St. Karen - what a shock!)

The next index on page 934 is a topical index, again very helpful when planning worship. And finally, the index that is most used, on page 955, the index of first lines and common titles of hymns.

Okay, for a minute, turn page to page 57. I've already talked to you about the things at the top of the hymn page, now take a look at the bottom. On the left

hand side you will find the names of the composers, authors and arrangers of the hymns, along with the dates they were written. On the right, you'll find two things. The word on top, in all caps is the name of the tune. The letters on the bottom are the meter of the hymn. The meter is the rhythm, the count of the syllables in the phrases of the hymn.

Let me explain. CM means Common Meter - which is 8, 6, 8, 6. Watch. O for a thousand tongues to sing - 8. My great redeemer's praise - 6. The glories of my God and King - 8. The triumphs of his grace - 6.

Now, why does that matter, you may ask? Let me show you. Every hymn has a meter written on the bottom of the page, and as you know, there's a metrical index in the back. Knowing the meter of a hymn, means that you can sing that hymn to any tune with that same meter.

Now, why does that matter? Well, suppose I wanted for us to sing a hymn that had really great words in it, but we didn't know the tune? I can go to the metrical index, find a hymn with the same meter that we know and switch the words.

Have I totally confused you? Well, let me illustrate. There's another hymn in our hymnbook written in common meter, that we happen to know very well. It's called "Amazing Grace." So, say we didn't know "O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing," but I wanted to use it anyway. We could sing it to the tune of Amazing Grace.

Let's give it a try. First, Sharon play the original tune of 57. Now, let's sing it to Amazing Grace.

How great is that!

Didn't I tell you our hymnal is filled with wonderful things? It is a great gift for worship!

Well, friends, I hope you have found this Worship 101 helpful. All of these things - all of them - the theology of worship, the season, the space, the music - all of it - helps us worship God fully and faithfully.

So I want to close this morning with some good words from John Ortberg, the author of the book many of us studied this summer, *If You Want to Walk on Water, You Have to Get Out of the Boat*. He says this about worship:

"We are to worship God, not because his ego needs it, but because without

worship, our experience and enjoyment of God are not complete. We worship God not so much because he needs it, but because we do.

I need to worship (he continues). I need to worship because without it I can forget that I have a Big God beside me and live in fear. I need to worship because without it I can forget his calling and begin to live in a spirit of self-preoccupation. I need to worship because without it I lose a sense of wonder and gratitude and plod through life with blinders on. I need to worship because my natural tendency is toward self-reliance and stubborn independence.” (John Ortberg, *If You Want to Walk on Water, You Have to Get Out of the Boat*, p. 196.)

Indeed, friends, we need to worship, and I’m so thankful that I get to worship with you. Thank you for being here in worship this day.

Amen.