

“WHY GO TO CHURCH? I – BECAUSE I LOVE GOD!”

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Elkton United Methodist Church
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World Communion Sunday

Psalm 27:1-6

Luke 7:36-50

Today is World Communion Sunday, It's a special day in the life of the universal church – a day when pretty much all Christians gather around the communion table and share the Lord's Supper. It's a wonderful way for us to remember every year that we're more than United Methodists, Presbyterians, Catholics, Lutherans, and so on – we're brothers and sisters in Christ, united in our love for and commitment to Him! So often we let the things about which we differ come between us, but on this day we remember that, when all is said and done, it's all about Christ. Period. And we are one in Him.

Yet, while we celebrate our unity, we also acknowledge what's happening in the church all over these days. I talked about it a few months ago, when I told you about the Pew Research Study that was conducted earlier this year – how regular attendance at church is declining steadily, and more and more people are turning away from religion rather than embracing it. Remember I told you about the “nones”, not nuns, like Catholic nuns, but “nones” – n o n e s – people who don't claim any religious affiliation. And how that's more and more accepted these days. We're in an uphill battle and lately, it looks like the church is losing.

Which is why I decided to do this new series of sermons called “Why Go to Church?” I think it behooves us to think about it – for ourselves – and for the next time someone challenges us with the question “why should I go to church?”

So for the next few weeks, we'll think about this question – but, make no mistake about it – today's answer to the question is the most important one – and it is this: “I go to church because I love God!” First and foremost.

I come to church because I love God, and this worship service is my opportunity to intentionally worship and praise him, and thank him for all he has done for me. I could be doing a million other things this morning, as could all of you – we could be reading the Sunday paper or watching TV, we could be grocery shopping or doing chores, we could be golfing or gardening, we could be laying around doing nothing, for that matter, but we're not. We're not, because we're here giving this time totally to God, focusing our attention on Him and Him alone. For some people, this is the only hour in the week they can (or do) totally focus on God!

Now, I know that you've had some of the same conversations I've had with other people, you know where they tell you they can be close to God on the golf course, or in their garden, or playing with their grandchildren. I get that, I really do. But the fact of the matter is that when you're on the golf course, though you may be thanking God for his glorious creation, you're also thinking about your tee shot. And while you're digging in the garden, you're also thinking about weeding and watering. And while you're playing with your grandchildren, you're making sure they're not going to hit their head on anything or fall. Well, you get the picture, however well-intentioned, worshiping God and God alone is so much more possible here in church, in worship. It's all about God for this hour!

And friends, an hour is not nearly enough time to tell God how much we love Him, is it? For there are so many things to say –

Lord, we love you for loving us first. For giving us life and breath, for giving us Jesus who gave us life in all its fullness, and life for all eternity.

And Lord, we love you for forgiving us. We know that we are all sinners standing in the need of grace, and you offer us that grace, over and over again. We love you for being the God of second chances, never giving up on us.

Lord, we love you for blessing us so abundantly – with our families and friends, with work that brings meaning to our lives, and leisure that fills them with joy. We love you for the beauty of your creation that greets us everyday- sunrises and sunsets, rainbows and clouds, changing leaves, even rain showers!

We love you, O God, for being with us always – in good times and in bad. We love you that when life gets hard, you carry us along. We love you, even for stretching us at times, and challenging us to be more than we thought we could be.

We love you Lord, for always being there – always and forever. There is never a moment that you aren't there, that you aren't surround us with your love and watching over us. We love you Lord for that and for so much more.

And because we do, we come here to church and offer our worship. That's one of the ways we show you how much we love you. We take this time, we commit this hour to say thank you and we love you. We acknowledge that life gets crazy these days and time flies by so quickly, and we get caught up in so many things, that sometimes you are put on the back burner – but that's why, O God, we come to church to put you front and center again as we start a new week.

I know this may seem simplistic, to make it as simple as this – that we come to church to love God – but it really is that basic and simple. Sure, there are other reasons that we'll talk about in the coming weeks, but the first and most basic

reason we come to church is because we love God and want to thank him. It's not any more complicated than that.

You know, a long, long time ago in the middle ages, a monk told his church that the next Sunday evening he would be preaching on the love of God. When the next Sunday evening came, and the shadows were falling and light was no longer coming through the stained glass windows, the congregation gathered. It was very dark.

Then, up the center aisle came the light from a candle being carried by the monk. He walked in silence up to the crucifix at the front of the church, and held the candle next to the crown of thorns on Jesus' head – and held it there for a few moments for all to look upon that.

Then he moved the candlelight to the wounds on Jesus' hands, and again, in silence, let people look upon those wounds.

Finally, he moved the candlelight so that people could see the mark of the wound on Jesus' side where the spear had struck him. In silence, they looked at that wicked wound.

A reverent hush filled the sanctuary, and finally, the monk extinguished the candle and left the altar. He had said not a word, for there was nothing to say, there was nothing he needed to say – all gathered there saw the love of God clearly that night.

In much the same way, in a few moments, all of us will see the love God clearly in front of us in the bread and wine of communion. That's all we need to see to know how much God loves us – the lengths to which he went for us, the sacrifice he made for us.

But before we do that, I want us to do one more thing. I want us to remember the woman in the Gospel lesson, who anointed Jesus so lavishly. It was her act of worship, she loved him so much, and was so grateful for his saving grace, that all she could do was worship him with her gift. It is such a beautiful moment, no one could have stopped her from showing her Lord how much she loved him, how grateful she was to him.

That's what worship should be for us – that no one can stop us from adoring the Lord, from thanking him for his many blessings, for telling him how much we love Him. So now, for a few moments, in silence, I want to invite you to, like that woman, pour out your love to God. Tell him, in the silence of your heart, why you love Him – right here, right now.

You could be in any number of different places this morning doing any number of different things, but you're not, you're here in church because you love God. So now, tell him why, in the silence of your heart.

O Lord God, in a world that would call us away from you in so many different ways, we choose to be here worshiping you, praising you, thanking you, loving you. Thank you Lord for loving us, thank you for blessing us, thank you for never forsaking us, never leaving us; and thank you, most of all Lord, for Jesus. Keep us ever faithful, and may our witness in worship compel others to experience the love you have for them as well. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.