

The Walk: Worship
Psalm 105:1-6 (NRSV)
Rev. Amanda Moseng

Today is the beginning of a sermon series entitled, “The Walk.” If you have been here at Church of the Saviour for a while, you might recognize this name. The Walk is focused on our five practices of faithful discipleship at COTS: worship, grow, serve, give, and invite. Consequently, The Walk is also the name of the foundational discipleship course we offer a few times a year, mainly for new members but everyone is welcome. Admittedly, this is not the first time we have done this sermon series. In fact, this is our third time. We do not repeat our other sermon series every two years, so why are we repeating this one? We keep coming back to these five practices because we firmly believe that they are the foundation for our life of faith, both as individuals and as a congregation. They are the practices that keep us connected to God and one another. We want to keep putting these in front of you as a reminder of who we are and what we do. The practices are not new, but we all need reminders to help us be better followers of Jesus. Each week we will explore each of the five practices in more detail and find ways to intentionally make them part of our daily lives. These five practices make us more connected, more grateful, and more faithful disciples.

Worship is the first of the five faithful practices. All of the practices are necessary and important, but worship is the practice that the largest percentage of the congregation participates in. For example, all of you are here this morning, whether in person or online. You are here to worship. Worship is a significant component of our individual faith and the gathered community. As clergy, we focus much of our energy on the Sunday morning worship experience. Why is worship so important?

Worship is central in the biblical tradition. Our psalm for today is one of many that call the faithful people of God to worship. The very first commandment is this “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.” This indicates that Israel (and consequently, us) should not worship any other gods other than the living, true God. In the New Testament, we see the magi falling down and worshipping the Christ child. Paul expands the understanding of worship in his letter to the Romans by writing “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship.” Revelation, the final book of the New Testament, comes to a close with the multitudes and angels worshipping God through song: “All the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, singing, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.” Worship is a theme running throughout scripture, from beginning to end. Worship is a central component of our lives as Christians.

At its most basic dictionary definition, worship is to honor or show reverence for, typically for a divine or supernatural being. In our case, that divine being is God. The modern English word “worship” comes from the Old English word “weorth-scipe”, literally “worth” and “ship.” It is ascribing worth to God. We worship God because we are God’s very own creation. We worship because we recognize the beauty and glory of all that God has created and continues to create. Worship describes what we do when we gather together. We praise and offer thanks to God.

We have a variety of worship styles here at Church of the Saviour and all are important and good. All are means of offering praise and thanks to God. We all have our preferences and that is just fine. We honor the ways that other people worship and experience God, even if it is not our preferred means. What matters is the posture of our heart and glorifying God. It is not about us, but about God. Fair warning, if anyone ever says to me “I did not get anything out of worship,” I am going to tell you, “Well, that’s okay. We were not worshipping you anyway.” Fair warning, I said! It is not about us and what we get out of worship, but rendering our praise and gratitude to God. It is all about God.

Our scripture passage from Psalm 105 highlights worship as a response to God. Worship is an action, a posture, a response. The psalmist uses clear and striking commands to convey the need to worship God: *Give thanks* to the Lord. *Call on* God’s name. *Make known* God’s holy deeds. *Sing* to God, sing praises to God. *Tell* of all God’s wonderful works. *Glory* in God’s holy name. *Seek* the Lord and his strength, and God’s presence continually. *Remember* the wonderful works God has done. These include both inward and outward expressions and acts of worship.

While the psalm in its entirety is a selective retelling of God’s great deeds, the overall theme is praise. This praise traverses the past, present, and future. The psalmist calls the people to remember the wonderful works God has done and give thanks. As we come to worship we remember what God has done for us and we express our gratitude. We remember what God has done in the past. Remembering what God has done for the Israelites, the psalmist brings it to the present moment by exhorting the worshippers to call on God’s name, sing to God, glory in God’s holy name, make known God’s holy deeds. This present assurance of God’s goodness and mercy empowers the psalmist and us to trust in our future with God, knowing that God is unchanging, steadfast, and true. We seek the Lord and his strength, and we seek God’s presence continually.

Continually is a key word, here. While it might seem like worship is just something you devote one hour to once a week, I want for you to see that worship goes far beyond that. In fact, worship can and should be a way of life. We should always seek God’s presence. The Message translation of Romans 12:1-2 is the foundational scripture for The Walk discipleship course, and I want to share it with you now. “So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around

life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.” Take your every day, ordinary life and place it before God as an offering. This is our act of worship. This is how we make worship a way of life.

As we go about making worship a way of life, we acknowledge that there are things we do individually and as part of a community. In fact, each of the five practices has two components: individual and community. The individual component is to pray five times each day. Now, I realize that might sound like a lot, but this is not asking you to pray long, elaborate prayers five times per day, unless you want to. We suggest praying when you wake up, before each meal (breakfast, lunch, and dinner), and before you go to bed. The mealtime prayers are an expression of gratitude and blessing before you enjoy the meal. The other two prayers are different and can be tailored to your unique situation. My personal practice is to lift a brief prayer to God first thing upon waking up, before getting out of bed. I sort of meander through that prayer in the time between my alarm going off and after hitting the snooze button. I offer my day to God, thank God for whatever lies before me, and ask to be aware of God's presence as I go throughout my day. At the end of the day, I thank God for the day and all that I experienced and learned, ask forgiveness for where I went astray, and ask God to help me rest in God's presence as I fall asleep. This is a rhythm that works for me. Find the rhythm that works for you but make prayer a priority during your day. Do not get hung up on time points because the point of prayer is to be in communication with God. It is a way to cultivate and nurture our relationship with God. In her book “To Pray and to Love”, Roberta Bondi describes prayer as primarily a means of growing in relationship with God: learning to know God, to want what God wants, to love what God loves. The point of prayer is not to “get something out of it” or “to be a better person.”¹ Prayer is about relationship. There is no one right way to pray, there is not a specific length of time or certain words you need to use. Having a regular rhythm of prayer is more important than intensity or length. Make daily prayer part of your worship practice.

The community component of worship is to worship every Sunday whenever possible. We recognize that there will be times and circumstances when you are not able to attend worship, such as illness, travel, and work. However, make it a priority to worship on Sunday mornings as much as possible. And thanks to technology, both our Modern Worship and Sanctuary services are livestreamed, so even if you cannot make it at the set worship time, you can always worship at a later time. The pandemic showed us how easy it is to get out of the

¹ Roberta Bondi, *To Pray and to Love*, 47.

habit of nearly everything, particularly with our normal rhythm and routines being interrupted. Worshipping online was the only option for well over a year. The rhythm of coming to worship each week was disrupted. While I personally prefer the in-person experience, I am glad that we can provide the livestream of our services so everyone, anywhere can participate in worship. While we miss seeing everyone in person, what matters most is regular participation in worship. Tony Evans, a popular Christian pastor, author, and speaker, offers this insight on regular worship participation: "I hear people say, "I don't have to go to church to be a Christian," and they are absolutely right. Salvation is through faith alone in Christ alone. You don't have to go home to be married, (either). But stay away long enough and your relationship will be affected." We are working to boost our online community experience because one of the best aspects of attending church in person is being with other people, the fellowship, and the conversations. Worship is a way to invest in our relationship with God and the gathered community. It shows what our priorities are. We were created to worship. So many other things will vie for our attention and worship. We have the responsibility to choose what is most important. Make it a priority to worship as often as you can.

Both of these components contribute to worship being a way of life. Worship is not just an hour on Sunday, but how you spend your entire week. Going to church to worship or watching the livestream is a great start and a great foundation for your week, but it is not enough. It is like having a huge feast in front of you and you only choose to eat a single dinner roll. Not knocking dinner rolls, they are great. But you get the picture. The possibilities and opportunities in our spiritual life are vast and endless because we love and serve and God who is endless, transcendent, and yet close as the breath in our lungs. We can always go deeper. There is always something new to learn and experience. Do not limit yourself. Carry worship into your entire week. The other four practices will help support that, as we will see during this sermon series, but make worship a priority. Let everything you do be an offering to God. Posture your heart with gratitude. Maintain awareness of God's presence as you go through your day. Seek God in the small, mundane moments. Be open to the Holy Spirit's leading and follow it. Worship is transformative and the real transformation occurs when we return to it, day after day, week after week. Let worship be your way of life and may it take us deeper in our walk with Christ. Thanks be to God. Amen.