

Sermon
Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene
Sunday, August 25, 2024
10am

Text: 1 Kings 8:1, 6, 10-11, 22-30, 41-43

Theme: Worship with Rejoicing: Sent Out to Live

[prayer]

Today we conclude our series on the parts of worship. If you thought last week was the end of the series because we focused on the benediction, that is completely understandable. But the benediction is not actually the end of worship. There is one more act: the commissioning or sending.

At the end of Matthew's gospel, after Jesus has risen from the dead, we are given this scene:

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. 18 Jesus came near and spoke to them, "I've received all authority in heaven and on earth. 19 Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age." (Matt 28:16-20 CEB)

This scene parallels an earlier scene: Jesus with Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. In Matthew 17, Jesus is transfigured in glory, foreshadowing his resurrected state. And just like at the end of the gospel, the disciples who are present worship him. They offer to build a makeshift tent or tabernacle on the mountain so Jesus can permanently make his home there. But Jesus is clear that they cannot stay; eventually they must go down the mountain.

What we learn from Jesus in both scenes is that true worship always gives way to action, to the ministry of making disciples and transforming the world. There is a progressive movement from the mountain, the temple, the sanctuary, to the

waiting world. God is not just here in our place of worship; God transcends this time and space.

Our worship of God must do the same. What the disciples experienced in the presence of the transfigured and risen Jesus was extraordinary; it transformed them. They left those spaces changed people. And that change empowered them to move from being disciples in the extraordinary and sacred spaces of their lives to being disciples in the ordinary and profane spaces. We, too, are sent out to take what we have learned in this set-apart time and put it into practice in the ordinary moments and spaces of our lives.

Six weeks ago, we began this series with the story of David dancing before the Ark of the Covenant as it was processed into Jerusalem. The Ark was the sacred box that contained the Decalogue – the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments given by God to the Hebrew people as a sign of God’s covenant with Israel. It was commissioned at the beginning of Israel’s wilderness years – four decades of wandering in the desert as they made their slow and winding way to the Promised Land. Everywhere they went it traveled with them as a symbol of God’s presence. After entering Jerusalem, the Ark was housed in the Tabernacle (tent of meeting) on the future Temple Mount until a permanent structure could be built. David had hoped to build this structure, but the Lord was clear that David’s son would build God’s house. In our Scripture lesson today, we finally come full circle as the Ark is settled in its permanent home and Solomon dedicates the Temple.

The Temple was intended to be the center of Israel’s worship activity. Synagogues were for reading and teaching the Torah, but the Temple embodied the maintenance of the covenant through ritual worship and sacrifice. This is the place where heaven and earth met, the focal point for the petitions of the people. The Ark of the Covenant was kept in the Temple’s inner sanctuary, called the Holy of Holies. This space was an earthly representation of God’s heavenly throne. The Temple therefore symbolized God’s sovereign reign over all the earth. In verse 12, Solomon declares,

*“The LORD has said he would tabernacle in thick darkness.
I [Solomon] have, indeed, built you a royal house,*

an establishment of your enthroning.”¹

What made the Temple holy was not the timber and stone with which it was constructed, or even the rituals the priests performed on behalf of the people. What made the Temple holy was the presence of God and the dynamic, living relationship he had with the worshiping community. After the priests moved the Ark into the Holy of Holies, “the Lord’s glory filled the Lord’s temple” (v. 11). This glory appeared in the form of a cloud that descended into the Temple. God’s glory would “tabernacle” (literally “stay over”) in the Temple sanctuary. In awe Solomon prays, “How could God possibly live on earth? If heaven, even the highest heaven, can’t contain you, how can this temple that I’ve built contain you?” (v. 27) The Temple was where God’s people could treat with the Lord, but God was by no means physically bound to that place. As Solomon notes, the fullness of God transcends any physical structure or institution built by human hands; it transcends even heaven itself.

Out of our love and commitment to the traditions of our church, we can forget that God is so much bigger than any one faith community or style of worship. And still God chooses to make himself known to us in the unique ways that we choose to gather: In our favorite songs and prayers; in the way proclaim the Word and celebrate at the Table; in this building that is a tremendous tool for ministry; and in the practices and traditions that make Community UMC our spiritual home.

But above all, we must remember that God ultimately chose to make Himself known to us in a person: Jesus Christ. John 1:14 says that

*The Word became flesh
and made his home among us.
We have seen his glory.*

The Temple gave way to the living, breathing body of Jesus Christ, in whom the presence of God “tabernacled” among us. The glory of God was made manifest in Jesus who lived and ministered among people...and then died and rose for us all.

¹ Translation by Choon-Leong Seow in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, vol. III (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 70.

After Jesus ascended into heaven, the church that he established and commissioned to “go and make disciples” became his body on the earth. And so, God now graciously tabernacles in each one of us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He tabernacles in the person who is sitting next to you, behind you, in front of you, across from you. And He tabernacles in *you*. God’s Spirit is dwelling in *you*.

We are prone to identify church too closely with what we do for one hour on Sunday mornings and not enough with the people we are called to be all the other minutes and hours and days of the week. Yes, what we do here is important. It is food for our spirits and without a regular rhythm of gathering and worshipping together the church dies. But we don’t eat for the sake of eating. We eat to nourish our bodies so we can then go and live healthy and fulfilling lives. Worship is the same. We gather together to nourish the body of Christ so we can then go and live as the body of Christ in the world.

Solomon’s prayer of dedication over the Temple emphasizes that the God who cannot be contained has come to dwell among God’s people – not just in our places of worship, but all around us. God lives in the neighborhood with us. We are called to worship God with our lives because our lives are where God is. This means that when our worship service ends today, and we walk out of these doors, our time of worship is not actually over. We continue to worship God with our lives by becoming incarnations of God’s love in the world, allowing the Spirit of God that is dwelling in us to shine through in everything we do and say.

At the end of our Scripture lesson Solomon prays that the Temple will bless *all* people, not just Israel, and the whole world will know God’s reputation and revere Him (v. 43) – not through the forcible conquest of Israel’s neighbors but through the blessing of their righteous actions in the world.

Of course, we would love for more of our neighbors to join us here on Sunday mornings and share in the communal and spiritual nourishment that we receive here. If you have not invited a friend or neighbor to worship in a while, I encourage you to do so. No form of marketing is more powerful than a personal invitation. But if we think inviting them to worship is the only way we can be the church to them, then we have entirely missed the point of church. Jesus did not say, “Come to church and make disciples”; he said, “*Go out* and make disciples.” To

believe that God dwells all around us is to believe that God's prevenient grace – the grace that goes before us – is already with our neighbors who do not know our church, or know our God, or have even rejected our God. What does it look like to worship with our neighbors where they already are? To seek God's presence out there, in the spaces they inhabit and the stories they have to tell? Worship God as though God lives in your neighborhood – because He does! How will you praise and serve Him there?

The final act of worship – the commissioning or sending – is often combined with the benediction. It is a call to action because this hour of worship is meaningless if it does not compel us to live as disciples in the world. Traditionally at the end of the benediction we say, "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." For a long time, I would forget this small but powerful sentence, until I was recently providentially reminded. So, I have begun adding it to our slides and practicing saying it out loud. It sums up our identity as a worshipping community. We are a people who has made peace with God through the blood of Jesus Christ. And that peace compels us to love and serve God by loving and serving our neighbors. This week, seek the Lord where he is to be found: With your neighbor. And then go and make disciples.

Amen.