

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scriptures: Luke 10:38:42; Hebrews 10:24-25

Luke 10

³⁸ Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. ³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” ⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴² but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

Hebrews 10

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

A dear lady was teaching the four and five-year-old Sunday School class at a church. During one of the lessons, they were learning about the building of the temple. She explained to the students that when the temple was finished, the presence of the Lord filled the temple. Instantly the eyes of each child got wide and full of excitement.

She soon discovered, however, that the source of their excitement was not joy that God had come to dwell in the temple, but rather, delight at imagining that huge building filled with presents—like Christmas and birthday presents—from God!

Aren't we often much like those children? We are easily more excited about our presents or gifts from God than being in the presence of God.

Why do we come to services at the church? And for those of you who cannot come to the church, but watch and listen to the service, virtually. why is it important for you to watch and listen? Maybe it is a discipline or habit you got into because as children your parents expected you to go to church with them.

My father, who was hurt by something that happened one time at a church, was not a churchgoer for a part of my childhood and teenage years; BUT he expected my brother and me to go with our mother to Sunday School and church. Sometimes I felt angry with my father because I had to go, and he didn't. As I grew older, especially in my adulthood, I grew into having a deep appreciation for going to church. It was then that I was grateful for my father forcing me to go to church. The really good news is that eventually he started attending regularly, too.

There isn't anything wrong with coming to church out of habit or because we believe it is the right thing to do. Our lives are shaped and directed by the ways we discipline ourselves. The most important experience we have when we come to church services is worshiping God. Our worship of God influences our actions throughout the week.

But, sometimes, as we're singing hymns in church, we realize that we're just going through the motions. We're singing words, perhaps even thinking about their meaning, but forgetting the fundamental reason why we're doing what we're doing.

Why do we worship? Let me first suggest unacceptable reasons for worship. I was reading an article written by Mark Roberts. On this topic he says, "We do not worship primarily to feel moved, though warm emotions frequently arise when we worship God. We do not worship primarily to 'get something out of the service,' though we often benefit from what happens when we gather with God's people for worship. We do not worship primarily for anything having to do with ourselves, though worship is one of the most meaningful and transformational things we do in life.

Psalm 47:1-2 gives us this reason for worship: *"Come, everyone! Clap your hands! Shout to God with joyful praise! For the LORD most High is awesome. He is the great King of all the earth." Did you catch that? It's easily missed. The primary reason for our worship is centered in one simple word: the word, "For." We worship God for God is who God is. We worship because of who God is and what God has done. Our worship is a response to God, to God's nature and activity."*

In the story of Mary and Martha, Mary sat at Jesus' feet while Martha busied herself with other duties that she felt needed to get done for them to have a comfortable visit with Jesus. I pictured her stomping her feet as she moved about, and glaring at Mary because she wasn't helping her. But Mary was in awe of Jesus. She wanted to give him her full attention. This was a worshipful moment for Mary.

When we come to church services, or join the services virtually, do we worship God with awe? Do we open ourselves to God's glorious presence? As we sing the hymns, give our offerings, pray, listen to the Word of God, are we worshiping God just for being God? If we are given opportunities to pray in silence, do we try to connect with God, or do our thoughts drift towards personal agendas? Are we humbling ourselves at God's feet to worship God with reverence? The Psalmist encourages us when he wrote, *"Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!"*

As we all know, we can worship God anywhere at any time. We don't need to be in the church. But the Bible tells us that it is good for us to be together. The Christian life was never meant to be solitary. All of the biblical metaphors for a church indicate a group, never individuality: we are a body, a flock, a building, and a holy nation. There are no "lone wolves" in biblical Christianity.

One of the scriptures commonly used to support congregational worship is Hebrews 10:22-25 (The Message), *"So let's do it—full of belief, confident that we're presentable inside and out. Let's keep a firm grip on the promises that keep us going. He always keeps his word. Let's see how inventive we can be in encouraging love and helping out, not avoiding worshiping together as some do but spurring each other on, especially as we see the big Day approaching."*

The early church sets an example to us for corporate worship. In Acts 2:44-47 we read, "All the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person's need was met. They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home—every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful—as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved.

A member of a certain church, who was attending services regularly, stopped going. After a few weeks, the minister decided to visit him. It was a chilly day. That evening, the minister found the man at home all alone sitting by a blazing fire.

Guessing the reason for his minister's visit, the man welcomed him, and led him to a comfortable chair near the fireplace and waited. The minister made himself at home but said

nothing. In serious moments of silence, he contemplated the dance of the flames around the burning logs. After some minutes, he took the fire tongs, carefully picked up a brightly burning ember and placed it to one side of the hearth all alone. Then he sat back in his chair—still silent.

The host watched all this in quiet contemplation. As the one lone ember's flame flickered and diminished, there was a momentary glow and then its fire was no more. Soon it was cold and dead. Not a word had been spoken since the initial greeting.

The minister glanced at his watch and chose this time to leave. He slowly stood up, picked up the cold, dead ember and placed it back in the middle of the fire. Immediately it began to glow once more, with the light and warmth of the burning coals around it.

As the minister reached the door to leave, his host said, with a tear running down his cheek, "Thank you so much for your fiery sermon. I shall be back in church next Sunday."

When we worship God together, we support and encourage one another. Jesus said, *"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"* (Matthew 18:20); so, worshiping with other believers welcomes the presence of God. Worshiping with other believers helps us to stay spiritually secure. We help one another to grow in our faith.

Worshiping together strengthens our relationships with other brothers and sisters in Christ. Worshiping together shows society that we support God's work in our world, that we are for Jesus rather than against Him (Matthew 12:30).

One thing unique about our worship experience is that not everyone can be with us in this building to worship God. But with the Holy Spirit's help, we worship together in spirit as those who cannot be here participate virtually. But those of you who are able to come to the church can help these brothers and sisters in Christ feel more connected to us.

In fact, I believe, we—all of us—not just the pastor, have a responsibility to our shut-ins, those who cannot come to the church: a responsibility to talk with them about their experience of worship, maybe read the scripture from a service, and, perhaps, even discuss a particular theme from a worship service. You could pray with them. If there are extra bulletins, which there usually are, you could take one to them. Sing the hymns in the bulletin with them. Let them know that they are a part of—an important part of—this gathering.

Worshiping together is crucial to our relationship with God and to each other. It is life giving to our souls and to our connectedness to each other.

Craig Brian Larson tells us this true story which you may remember. He writes, "Not long ago, the world watched as three gray whales, icebound off Point Barrow, Alaska, floated battered and bloody, gasping for breath at a hole in the ice. Their only hope was to somehow be transported five miles past the ice pack to open sea. Rescuers began cutting a string of breathing holes about 20 yards apart in the six-inch-thick ice.

"For eight days they coaxed the whales from one hole to the next, mile after mile. Along the way, one of the trios vanished and was presumed dead; but finally, with the help of Russian icebreakers, the whales Putu and Siku swam to freedom.

"In a way, worship is a string of breathing holes the Lord provides His people. Battered and bruised in a world frozen over with greed, selfishness, and hatred, we rise for air in church, a place to breathe again, to be loved and encouraged, until that day when the Lord forever shatters the ice cap."

Worship is a very important lifeline to God and each other. So, may our embers glow with great intensity, fanned by the flames of worshiping God together. May we never be too busy to worship God. Our souls depend on it for life. Amen.