

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church – Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Third Sunday in Lent
March 3, 2024
Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft
Worship 101

¹Then God spoke all these words: ²I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, where you were slaves. ³You shall have no other gods beside me. ⁴You shall not make any carved image for yourself or a likeness of anything in heaven above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. ⁵Do not bow down to them or be subservient to them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God. I follow up on the guilt of the fathers with their children, their grandchildren, and their great-grandchildren, if they also hate me. ⁶But I show mercy to thousands who love me and keep my commandments.
–Exodus 20:1-6

You have heard the expression “Preaching to the choir,” It means repeatedly speaking about a subject that all people agree with. An example of preaching to the choir would be going to a health club or gymnasium where people are working out and saying, “Attention everybody! You need to exercise. It’s good for you.” They don’t need to be told to exercise – they already are. Today we will be speaking about the subject of worship to people who have gathered here in church to worship, and many of you come Sunday after Sunday to our worship services. Isn’t that like preaching to the choir? Well, on the one hand we always do need a ‘strong choir’ but yet all of us need to review the fundamentals of worship. Worship is among the most important things we do. I have titled the message this morning ‘Worship 101’. We will take a brief look at the who, the how, and the why of worship. .

The first point about worshipping God is that there is a God. There is no excuse for being an atheist. The world about us with all of its order shows there is a God. Somebody had to make it. Believing that this world sprung into existence by itself is like believing that our new Ministry and Education Building sprung into existence by itself. The Psalmist wrote, “The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands.” (Psalm 19:1) But in addition to that loud voice from the created world that says there is a God is also that voice within us that says loudly there is a God. It is not a wonder that God’s Word says in several places that the one who says there is no God is a fool.

The Bible tells us who the true God is. He is the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The very first commandment He gave is “You shall have no other gods beside me.” When Satan as he was tempting Jesus asked Jesus to bow down before him, Jesus replied, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” God is to be number one in your life. Whatever is first is your god. There is the danger at least from time to time that we allow something else to slip in as number one in life. Sometimes it is the god spelled with just one letter, the capital letter I. “I will do what I want to do and when I want to do it. I am the master.” It is as if we sing “Take me life and let it be Consecrated Lord TO ME”. Other times we can make gods out of things which of themselves are not evil. Money is an example. Money is a blessing from our Lord. We need money to live; we bring offerings of money in our worship of God. But is it not true that instead of mastering our money, we at times let it become our master. “The love of money is the root of all sorts of evil.”

Another thing that we can allow to become our god is sports. Now this is not a tirade against sports. Sports is wonderful. It has many benefits.

There are few if any metro areas so full of sports activities as our area. Consider the following sports items in the Phoenix metro area:

- A team from every major sports league

- Spring Training by Half of Major League Baseball Teams
- In the year 2023 the World Series was played here and we hosted the Super Bowl.
- Final Four of the men's NCAA basketball tournament will be played here
- The WNBA All-Star game is hosted in Phoenix
- Major Golf Tournament every year
- In or near our congregation's location
- Arizona State University Athletic program close by
- Many sports coaches and sports participants worship regularly here at Emmanuel
- From our congregation are athletes who have received college athletic scholarships.
- ASU starting quarterback worships at Emmanuel
- The field goal kicker who several years ago kicked the winning field goal over the rival University of Arizona is a member of Emmanuel
- Seven people from our congregation have run in the Boston Marathon
- Our boys' grade school basketball team won yesterday's tournament, the girls won in the consolation bracket

I love sports and participated in them. As some of you know I am an avid Green Bay Packer fan. But things can go too far. As I was traveling with Ginger and one of my granddaughters approaching Green Bay on US Highway 41, you can spot the Packer Stadium. On it is a large letter G. I teasingly told my granddaughter that in the hearts of many people around here and other places the letter G often stands for god. It controls people. Some people actually had to go to counselors when the Packers lost key games. Sad to say, those in charge of youth sports activities often schedule practices and games on Sunday morning, the day of worship. And that causes dilemmas for church families. Make sure that God is number one. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your mind and all your soul." Some of you memorized from the Catechism the 'What does this mean?' part of the First Commandment: "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things."

Worship 101. How do we worship God? There are many ways but let's look briefly at two. One is by going to church to worship. So important is going to church that God has given a commandment about it, The Third Commandment from God is, Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy. In another verse the Holy Spirit wrote, "Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together." In giving the Third Commandment God is not intending to make life miserable for us but to bless us. You come to hear God's Word and receive communion. But you come also to worship. We are worshipping the Lord by the very fact that we are present and that we participate in prayers and hymns and offerings. Our services are called worship services. We go to church not only to receive but also to give worship.

But worshipping God is not a Sunday only thing. It is throughout every day of our life. It is obeying the laws of God which are summed up in the Ten Commandments. The person who loves God seeks to follow God's commandments. John wrote, "This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome." You are worshipping God in your everyday life by obeying God. A hymn says, "Take my moments and my days, Let them flow in ceaseless praise."

But you know that there is something even more horrifying than being an atheist. Those are the many who know there is a God but ignore Him and His commandments. Among them are people who had been Christians. They do not deny the doctrine of the Trinity or that Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world. Some of them might still claim to be believers and Christians but they disregard God. Their lifestyle defies God. Some of them might pray to God but they do not listen to Him. They are atheists in practice. Judgment Day will be harsher for them. They are like atheists. Let us be on guard.

We have talked about the who and the how. But now the why. Why worship? Why obey? We will provide two reasons. The first one we speak about has everything to do with respecting God.

Immediately before God gave the commandments He spoke these words, I am the Lord your God. God reminds you that He is God and that He has authority over us. A mother told her son to clean up his room. But the son didn't want to. Mother told him again, but he refused and then he sassily added the words, "Why should I?" Mom answered, "You do it because I told you to do it. I am your mother and that's that." There had been no question about whether she was his mom but she said these words to show her authority over him.

Our Lord has every right to tell us what to do. He has the authority to tell us to worship. After saying, I am the Lord your God, He proceeded to give the Ten Commandments. These are not Ten Suggestions but Ten Commandments. He is serious about the matter and so should you. He is not like a pushover grandparent who gives the grandchildren almost whatever they want and spoils them. God is serious about this matter and threatens to punish those who refuse. Don't ignore God or His commandments. But we are to obey not so much because we are afraid of punishment but because we respect God.

The main motivation why we worship God is love. It is God's love for us. The first words in the definition of the commandments in the Catechism are "We should fear and love God....." Right before God gave the commandment to the Israelites, He said, I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, where you were slaves. Three months before the giving of the commandments at Mount Sinai God had delivered them from Egypt as He miraculously parted the waters of the Red Sea. They were on their way to the Promised Land. God had chosen these people to be the ancestors of Christ, the Savior. He would provide manna for them. He loved them/

God has also a wonderful love for you. Throughout your years He has provided food and clothing and abilities and income. He's taken care of you. Above all He has forgiven your sins. Fifteen hundred years after Mount Sinai and the giving of the commandments the Savior Jesus Christ was born in the Promised Land. In our place and for our benefit He did something we could not do. He kept these commandments perfectly. To us He has given His righteousness, from us He has taken our sins and suffered the punishment of them. Through Him we are on the way to the Promised Land of heaven.

We are told also that God is a jealous God. Yes, most jealousy is a sin but not this kind. This kind is a good kind. It means that God loves us. Just as a husband should be jealous and upset when his wife runs away with another man, so our loving God is upset when we stray from Him. You see, the only way to heaven is through our God - all other ways lead to hell. God's attitude if we leave Him is not summed up with the words, "See if I care. Just go to hell." God loves us dearly and does not want us to harm ourselves by straying.

We in turn love Him as the Bible Passage says, "We love Him because He first loved us." Hear also another passage from John's first epistle, "This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome. (1 John 5:3)

Even the giving of the commandments is an act of love. God is not trying to make your life miserable with the Ten Commandments. Each of them is a blessing and is protecting you. With the commandment forbidding murder God is protecting your body and life. The commandment about stealing is protecting your possessions and property. By forbidding lies and false witness, God is protecting the truth and your reputation.

A hymn verse puts it very well.

Make me to walk in Thy commands-- 'Tis a delightful road-

Nor let my head or heart or hands Offend against my God.

May you worship our gracious Lord in sincere joy.