

(10-13-24) The Essentials (2)

The Community of Worship

Romans 12:1-2

As we continue our sermon series, **The Essentials**, we will discuss our identity as God's community. We must not compromise on these things but persistently hold onto them, no matter what challenges we may face. We must also have a proper and accurate understanding of those essentials.

Last Sunday, we delved into the meaning of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a **Day of Remembrance**, a day to remember who God is, who we are, and those who have lost their Sabbath. As we remember who God is, what God has done for us, and God's promises to us, our natural response to the remembrance is our **worship**. Simply put, worship is an expression of our love for God and is meant to bring Him pleasure.

Let me ask you this question: What was the most memorable worship experience in your life? Why do you think that experience has been stored in your heart as the most memorable worship experience? Take a moment to reflect on it. Let me share mine with you.

When I served at Detroit Korean UMC, I was invited to lead an interdenominational group of young adults from other Korean churches in Michigan. Most of them were international students, which meant they were full-time students and had to return to Korea or find a job in the United States after completing their studies. We planned to have combined worship services twice a year. In the spring, young adult members from the Korean churches in Ann Arbor got together to praise and worship God. In the fall, young adult members from the Korean churches in East Lansing also got together to experience God's special presence in their worship.

We set three rules as we aimed to create this type of inclusive worship experience. First, the senior pastor at the church where the worship was happening would be a speaker during the service. Second, the worship team needed to be made up of students from the local area. Lastly, the offerings would be used for the summer young adult retreat.

I experienced God's special warm presence when the worship was in East Lansing. If I remember correctly, it was October 2008. It was a Sunday afternoon, and the church was not big enough to hold everyone who attended the worship that day. So, they had to put extra chairs wherever they could find space. The sanctuary was packed with not only young adult members but also other

Christians from the area. When the combined worship band played the first worship song, I could feel that God was with us right away and wanted to accept our worship. There were no barriers between young and old, Koreans and non-Koreans. We praised God with all our hearts and strength and could find God's special anointing in the worship service. After the worship, we invited young adult members to join the upcoming summer retreat. It meant they had to return to Michigan earlier to join the retreat after their summer vacation. The following year's retreat was a big success.

Karl Barth says, "Christian worship is the most momentous (모멘터스), the most urgent, the most glorious action that can take place in human life." (J.J. von Allmen, *Worship* (1965), 13.). Robert Webber says, "Worship is a meeting between God and His people. In this meeting God becomes present to His people, who respond with praise and thanksgiving. Thus, the worshiper is brought into personal contact with the One who gives meaning and purpose to life; from this encounter the worshiper receives strength and courage to live with hope in a fallen world." (Robert Webber, *Worship Old & New* (1982), 11-12)

That is why we cannot compromise our worship for anything in the world. Worship is an essential part of our identity that we cannot forsake. Through worship, we can be healed, renewed, and motivated for the purpose of our lives. We can find encouragement and strengthen our faith as we have special encounters with God in our worship.

Romans 12 is an application chapter following the Apostle Paul's explanation of the doctrine of "justification by faith only" in the previous chapters — if we are saved through the faith in Jesus Christ, we are to live up to the faith. The very first application of our faith is worship.

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, on the basis of God's mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:1-2 NRSV)

We are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is our reasonable act of worship.

How can we present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God? **Wherever our body is, that is the place of our worship.** Worship is not confined to 9:30 am in our sanctuary every Sunday morning. Worship is a lifestyle. When you drive your car, when you participate in your grandchildren's sports activities,

and when you teach at your school, your presence there is for worship. **The way you treat people in the world reflects how you worship God.**

There is a church that has a parking lot exit sign that says, **“Now, You Begin the Second Service.”** Wherever we go, that is our worship place.

If we try to define worship in a single word, it would be 'sacrifice.' Without sacrifice, there is no worship. Similarly, the meaning of biblical love can also be defined as 'sacrifice.' Our worship is an expression of our love for God and a response to His love. That is why Jesus said, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me' (Luke 9:23 NIV). This is Jesus Christ's invitation to our daily worship. Every day, we deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus as His disciples.

When we give our life to God as a sacrifice, it has to be holy and acceptable to God. This means there are rules and ways we have to follow when we give our praise and worship to God.

Let us read the following Scripture together. **“For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.”** (John 4:24 NLT). “God is Spirit” means “God is invisible, infinite, and everywhere.” Also, we are to worship God in spirit. If the word ‘spirit’ is about the Holy Spirit, our worship has to be guided by the Holy Spirit. It’s the Holy Spirit who awakens in us an understanding of God’s beauty and splendor and power. It’s the Holy Spirit who stirs us to celebrate and rejoice and give thanks. If the word is about our human spirit, our worship must originate from the heart; it must be sincere, motivated by our love for God and our gratitude for all He is and has done.

Also, we are to worship in truth. Our worship must conform to the revelation of God in Scripture. To worship inconsistently with what is revealed to us in Scripture ultimately degenerates into idolatry.

Let us read the Scripture on the screen together.

“But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca (An Aramaic term of contempt),’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:22-24 NIV)

Let us go back to the story I shared with you in the beginning. After the worship, I asked the combined worship band how they had prepared for the worship service. I was very surprised when I heard their testimonies. The young adult members met together for two months every Sunday afternoon to pray and practice for worship until the day of the worship service. When they prayed, they prayed for the young adult groups in each of the churches in East Lansing. There were conflicts and problems in the young adult groups in some of the churches. They prayed for the healing of the churches. Some shared their relationship problems with their parents. They prayed for one another. Also, several in the band fasted one or two meals every day during the two months. That was why they could experience God's healing presence whenever they met for practice.

God commands us, **“Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind,”** (Romans 12:2a). In every generation, the people of God have been challenged not to worship God properly. Even though we are in an idol-worship culture, God will continuously transform His people through their worship as they exercise forgiveness and worship God in spirit and truth wherever they go.

We are called to be God's worshiping community so that we can be transformed to continually reveal who God is through our worship life in the world.