

Regularly Attending Worship

Exodus 20:1-6

Last Sunday, we had time to think about the second Means of Grace, “Searching the Scripture.” This involves reading the Bible, studying the Bible, and meditating on the Bible. As we engage with the Bible, we can develop the fear of God, which is the beginning of our knowledge (Prov. 1:7) and wisdom (Ps. 111:10). It is our pursuit of God’s holiness, rejecting sins that affect both our bodies and spirits (2 Cor. 7:1), and hating evil, pride, arrogance, evil behaviors, and perverse speech (Prov 8:13). Christ himself is the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24. 30). Thus, as we search the Scripture, we can be more like Jesus Christ, connecting with Christ’s wisdom and power in our words and actions.

The third Means of Grace we are going to explore today is “[Regularly Attending Worship](#).”

Last year, there was a Gallup survey on “[The State of Church Attendance](#).” According to the report, “[20% of Americans attend church every week. 41% of Americans are in monthly church attendance or more. 57% of Americans seldom or never attend religious service. According to both Gallup and Pew Research Center, regular church attendance has steadily declined since the turn of the century.](#)”

Many churches, after Covid, seem to experience a decline in worship attendance, and our church is the same. Last year, I tried to find the trend of worship attendance in the churches at our conference. I was shocked because churches that used to have 400 or more Sunday worship attendants now have around 100 or 150. Churches that used to have 200 attendants now have just 50 or below. I had a wonderful time at the Korean Caucus Retreat in Troy. We used a chapel and a room at Troy First United Methodist Church. They warmly welcomed us and showed us heartfelt hospitality to our Korean pastors and their spouses. They merged with Bloomfield Hill St. Paul UMC in early 2022. Now, they have one worship service on Sundays and have 120 to 150 in attendance. We have to revisit the meaning of worship and honestly review our spiritual state regarding our practice of worship.

What is worship?

Simply put, worship is a [remembrance, celebration, participation, and expectation](#). Worship is remembering and celebrating who God is to us and what God has done for us. Also, worship is to participate in God’s redemptive work through Christ in the world, expecting Christ’s final victory in His Kingdom. In our

worship, as we remember God, celebrate what He has done, participate in His redemptive work, and anticipate His final victory in His Kingdom, we experience God's grace that can transform us to be more like Jesus Christ. This is why worship must be the backbone of our lives.

This morning, I'd like to share three things we must remember as "Regularly Attending Worship" is an essential Means of Grace for our transformation.

First, we must remember who we are according to the Covenant we have in Jesus Christ.

"Then God spoke all these words, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery;" (Exodus 20:1-2 NRSV)

Moses and the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai after around 50 days of journey from Egypt. Before God gave the Ten Commandments to Israel through Moses, God made sure who they were as God's Covenant people.

"You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now, therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be **my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me **a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.**" These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites." (Exodus 19:4-6 NRSV).**

It's a declaration of God to the world about His relationship to Israel. Let me paraphrase the scriptures: **"I saved you from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. I have nurtured, guided, and protected you. I love you. You belong to me. I have selected you for my own plan to save the world. You are to reveal my holiness to the world."** We are in a covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Christ shed his blood on the cross to cleanse our sins and to give us a new life, which is eternal life (God's life). We are God's beloved children. We are under God's protection and guidance. We worship God because of God's salvation for us. We worship God because of God's covenant relationship with us through Christ. This confession and acknowledgment have to be deeply and uncompromisingly anchored to our hearts.

Let us focus on the phrases **"priestly kingdom"** and **"holy nation."**

This means that the Israelites were called not for their own sake but to serve as priests for other nations, acting as intermediaries between God and the nations and reflecting God's holiness to them. We can find the same message in the New Testament. **"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."** (1 Peter 2:9 NRSV)

We worship God because God has chosen us to proclaim His excellence, which is God's salvation and God's invitation to reveal His light to the world. We worship God because of our missionary role in the world.

There was a lady who had always wanted to attend church, but she hesitated due to her fear of not being accepted. Whenever she passed by a church in her neighborhood, she watched people entering the church with bright smiles on their faces, wearing clean and wonderful clothes. She always thought, "What if I could join their worship service? They must be very kind and compassionate people since they are Christians." Finally, she met a friend who invited her to come to a Sunday worship service. And she did. She made some good friends at the church. She felt the church accepted her as their family. Later, she said, "The church was not exactly the same as I had dreamed of. But the church is definitely a place of God's grace. There were times I was so frustrated with people's words and actions in the church. But God has allowed me to encounter Him during the worship service where I could regain my strength and power."

Please know that we are being observed by our neighbors, our children and grandchildren, and even our spouses. We are all called to be authentic worshipers of God, as we are part of God's royal priesthood and holy nation.

Second, we must remember that we become what we worship.

"You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below." (Exodus 20:3-4 NRSV)

After clarifying Israel's covenant relationship with Him, God clearly commands to only worship Him and not worship any idols. Throughout the Book of Exodus, God repeatedly emphasizes this command. Why? This is because we become what we worship.

"Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them." (Psalm 115:4-8, ESV)

"Thus says the Lord: 'What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthlessness, and became worthless?'" (Jeremiah 2:5 ESV)

We must ask ourselves, "What am I worshipping? What am I willing to sacrifice my life for? Where do I invest my money, time, and energy?" If we long for

transformation and desire to be God's priestly kingdom and holy nation, we must worship God wholeheartedly. We must never allow anything in the world to take priority over our time of worship. Instead, our lives should be firmly rooted in and built upon our worship of God.

Lastly, our worship today can be a blessing for our children tomorrow.

“You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

(Exodus 20:5-6 NRSV)

God's blessing or judgment upon future generations depends on how we worship Him today. Our love for God and obedience to His commandments are expressions of true worship. The promise of His steadfast love for thousands of generations begins with us and our devoted worship of Him.

Let me share some good news with you. According to [Barna Research's recent State of the Church report](#), 39% of Millennials (born between 1981 and 1996, also known as *Generation Y*) report attending church on a weekly basis. This is a significant increase compared to the previous years, placing them at a much higher attendance rate than Generation X and even the Boomer generation.

Let us faithfully worship God. In our worship, we will be transformed as we encounter God's grace, and the world will be transformed as we live up to our call as God's priesthood and holy nation.