

H. Michael Brewer
Crescent Springs Presbyterian Church
April 22, 2007

WORTHY THE LAMB!
Revelation 5:11-14

Two weeks ago, we embraced the hope that Easter awakens in us. Last Sunday, we had a wonderful, uplifting service celebrating the joy of Easter. Today our thought turn to worship, the adoration and praise that Easter evokes. If hope and joy are God's Easter gifts to us, worship is our gift to God, and worship flows naturally from the wonder of Easter.

Consider the women on their way back from the empty tomb. Suddenly the risen Lord appears to them and they "took hold of his feet and worshipped him." (Matthew 28:9) When Thomas saw Christ alive, he fell to his knees and cried, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28) Luke says the witnesses of the resurrection "returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the Temple blessing God." (Luke 24:52-53) Later the disciples follow Christ to a mountain in Galilee, and Matthew tells us, "When they saw him, they worshipped him." (Matthew 28:17)

Easter and worship go hand in hand. They are inseparable. Soak up these lines from Revelation 5, a vision of the multitudes gathered before Christ in heaven:

I looked again. I heard a company of Angels around the Throne, the Animals, and the Elders—ten thousand times ten thousand their number, thousand after thousand after thousand in full song:

The slain Lamb is worthy!

Take the power, the wealth, the wisdom, the strength!

Take the honor, the glory, the blessing!

Then I heard every creature in Heaven and earth, in underworld and sea, join in, all voices in all places, singing:

To the One on the Throne! To the Lamb!

The blessing, the honor, the glory, the strength,

For age after age after age.

The Four Animals called out, "Oh, Yes!" The Elders fell to their knees and worshipped. (Revelation 5:11-14 from *The Message*)

In worship we declare who God is. We acknowledge our Creator, we name our Lord, we claim our Savior. Worship is both praise and witness. We describe the nature of God, we remember God's mighty acts in history, we proclaim the sheer inexpressible goodness and power and love of God. At the same time we bear witness to the world (and to ourselves) that there is One who is bigger than life, One who reigns in love, One who can be trusted to save us, One who rightfully lays claim to our whole hearts.

Not long ago, my mother said to me, "Thanks for the card you sent me. I mean the card Jan picked out and addressed and laid in front of you so you could sign it." I could argue that after all this time, my mother should know that I love her, but that misses the point, doesn't it? So I'll shop for a Mother's Day card soon, something syrupy with bad poetry that will please Mom.

The reason I bother with Mother's Day is more-or-less the same reason I bother with worship. If I did not write or call or visit my mother on Mother's Day, she would be hurt for having been neglected, and I would be less of a human being for having neglected her.

In worship we don't tell God anything that God doesn't already know. Maybe we don't learn anything that we didn't already know. Yet there is something profoundly right about worship. As human beings our chief end, our primary purpose, is to glorify and enjoy God. Logical or not, when we neglect worship, God is grieved and we are diminished.

In worship we not only declare who God is, we also declare who we are. Discovering our identity is one of the great tasks of human life. Are we consumers? Producers? Are we a social security account or a Facebook profile?

In worship, we boldly and unapologetically declare that we are the children of God, marked in the waters of baptism, and fed at the Table of Christ. We are forgiven sinners who refuse to trust in our own righteousness. We are followers of the Risen Lord, living as he lived, loving as he loved. We are co-workers with God, giving our substance and ourselves for the sake of a broken world. We are the communion of saints, gathered with the whole host of heaven and earth at the throne of the Most High.

Identity always involves us in a family. Worship brings us into the household of God, strengthens our ties to the family of faith. Families exist through rituals: bedtime rituals, mealtime rituals, holiday rituals, morning rituals. This is the stuff families are made of. Families form themselves around shared experiences. Some of those shared experiences happen only once—like birth—but we keep the experience alive with memory, storytelling, and birthday parties.

Other experiences happen over and over—like my grandmother's buttermilk biscuits and red-eye gravy. Grandma is gone, but those breakfasts remain part of the lore and fabric of the Brewer clan, part of our identity.

In the family of Christ we are bonded together in large measure by our shared rites and rituals, our common experiences of worship. Let me demonstrate. When hearts are joined in adoration, when spirits are stirred by the old words of the old stories, when voices are blended in song, then the lonely and scattered become family, the many become one.

So worship teaches us who God is and who we are and what family we belong to. Is there more? Oh, yes! Worship teaches us how to live. Worshipping is rehearsal for living. Life is mostly habit. We don't have to wrestle with questions like, Should I kiss my spouse goodbye? Should I go to work today? Should I stop for that red light? We live by habits, and worship teaches us some good habits.

Hymns teach us the habit of praise and thankfulness. Prayers teach us habits of trust and honesty. Confession teaches us to be humble and gentle with the faults of others. Scripture, creed and sermon reinforce our beliefs. It's easier, for instance, to say "no" to drugs or sex in the back seat or an affair with a co-worker or stealing from your job, it's easier to say "no" to the things we don't believe in if we've rehearsed the things we do believe in. On Sunday we practice for Monday.

One last thought. Worship improves our outlook, brightens our worldview, because worship focuses our heart on what is uplifting and life-giving. The word "worship" derives from the word "worth." In worship we seek the worthy. Worship is

attitude adjustment—time spent feasting on the saving love of God, the goodness of creation, the friendship of the Holy Spirit, the empowering example of Jesus Christ.

In writing to his favorite congregation, the apostle Paul gave this enduring advice. “Beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” The Greek actually says to “keep an account of these things.” We savor God’s good gifts, we keep track of every uplifting and inspiring grace, we keep a running tally, adding them up and then adding them again. The more our worship fills us with what is worthy, the less room there is inside us for fear, despair, and bitterness.

In fact, if someone were to ask, “Why do Christians worship?” The best answer would be, “Because we can’t help it. We can’t hold it back. God has done such a thing in Christ, that the wonder of it, the power of it, the goodness of it bubbles up inside us and it has to come out as praising and thanking and singing!”

Why do we worship? It’s the wrong question for Christians. Given who God is, given who we are, the question is, How could we not worship? Indeed, friends, how could we not?

Soli Deo Gloria!