

Worship!

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Date: 13 February 2022

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[0 : 00] Okay, we're going to turn to Acts chapter 2. And Corey last week mentioned and preached on the first part of our vision. Our vision is to be a healthy city center church in and for Edinburgh committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ and worship discipleship community and mission.

And we're taking these five weeks to look at this vision statement. So Corey looked at being the importance in the New Testament, have been a city center church and our basis for that in the book of Acts.

And today I'm looking at the first of these four characteristics worship discipleship community and mission. I'm looking at worship. But in many ways what I want to say by way of introduction is that these things do fuse together.

They're not all individual really and they're not all separate. There's a quadrinity really. There's four things that come together in this vision that we have for the church.

And if you, I am the worst ever mathematician. So this is probably a tell example. But I do remember 45 years ago doing Venn diagrams.

[1 : 06] Did they still do Venn diagrams? I don't know. Venn diagrams, circles, intersect. And so I guess if you had these four worship discipleship community and mission as circles, they would all intersect together.

And where they overlap, where the four of them overlap would be where we want to be, St. Columbus as a church. So they all come together in many ways. And we hope that all churches that have Jesus Christ as the center and the core of their life and worship will be the same, but with different emphasis and different kind of perspectives on some of them.

But today I'm looking at worship, which is the first of these four, which is the core things that we're engaged in, the core things that we do and that are important to us.

And obviously that's a huge subject. And it's a subject that really does cover all the other areas as well. But I'm going to focus on really one aspect of that, which is our corporate worship, our worship together, our public worship in many ways.

That's what I'm hoping to focus on. The communal part of our Christian lives. Sundays, what we do on a Sunday when we gather together and as groups when we gather during the week.

[2 : 25] That's really what I want to focus on because I know that we could focus on much more. We know Romans 12 talks about offering our bodies as living sacrifices, which is our acceptable worship to God.

And we know that all of our life is worship. We know that you have the personal disciplines of prayer and Bible study, which is worship or reading the Bible as I think Kody mentioned Wednesday, meditating on God's Word, these spiritual disciplines.

And we know there's one to one discipleship, which is all part of worship. But do remember, even when we're living our Christian lives alone, as we think, or individually, you're never alone because you're fused into the Trinity of God.

You're part of His community. So even when we are praying and living on our own, we are part of the divine community in our lives. And that is expanded as we think of our worship together.

To belong to Jesus Christ is to be part of a worshiping community. It's our critical identity. One Peter 2 says that once you were not a people, now you are a people.

[3 : 37] And we are a worshiping people together. And so for a few minutes, I just want to look at what that, not in any way exhaustively, but what that might look like in some cases, what does it mean to have, what is worship?

What does it look like for us as we follow the prescriptions of Scripture and particularly here in Acts 2 at the very beginning of the church? So we see this people who become Christians and

immediately they are a worshipping people and a worshipping people together. It's embryonic. I know that. It's prototypical, is it where? It's new. And that worship would develop and mature and change in some ways. But the principles that are behind what happened at the very beginning of the Christian church, the New Testament, are significant and important and we want to believe in them and emphasize them.

So when we talk about worship, what do we mean when we say worship? When we speak about corporate coming together, Sunday worship together, what is it? Well, I think there's a number of things from this passage that I want to highlight.

The first is that it's spirit-filled worship. We read that a little bit in verses 37, which was these people becoming Christians, they asked Peter, what will we do to be saved, and he said, repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[5 : 11] So what marked off that community of people right from the very beginning was something unique was that they were a spirit-filled people. They were a people who had a personal relationship with God.

The brokenness, the barrier between themselves and God that was caused by sin had been taken away as they repented and trusted and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.

God became a reality to them, became personal to them, and as I said, they and we become uniquely linked and united to the Trinity in this loving social, genus and personal God.

That's who we come to know, and that is an amazing reality for us. And it leads to an immediate paradox for us, because when we come into a relationship with a living God, we come into a relationship with truth and even with absolute truth, and that gives us a sense of fixed foundational dependence upon what God has revealed.

And yet that fixed reality that is part of what He reveals to Himself about us is fused and merged with a deep, deep humility because we are not worthy of being in a relationship with Him because of sin.

[6 : 42] He is gifted as salvation, and it makes us as a people both those who hold on to truth as we see it revealed in God through Jesus Christ, yet who are humble and generous and welcoming because that is how God has treated us.

So it was kind of, it's a paradoxical thing to be humble and generous and welcoming and regard everyone the same, but also hold on to truth that is fixed and unchanging.

So we are a people who are Spirit-filled and who share all of us as Christians. Everyone here who is Christian, if you're not a Christian today, it's magnificent to have you here, and we hope that you find Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

So those of us who are here have a common DNA, we have the Spirit, a shared DNA, the Spirit of God lives in us. We have Jesus as a common Savior together.

We are baptized in the Holy Spirit, united to the Father, and everyone, and we must always remember that, everyone is welcome to come and join with us in worship, but the heart worship that we offer can only come when we surrender our hearts to Jesus Christ and repent and are baptized.

[8 : 02] And that means that in terms of our Spirit-filled characteristic, we are a people of forgiveness. We have repented and believed. And so the atmosphere we believe when we gather together is an atmosphere of forgiveness.

It's not a tight, self-righteous, judgmental spirit, but it's a forgiving spirit where sinners saved by grace. So you might know, you have to know here as a congregation that we're big on forgiveness. When you've got me as a minister and Corey as the assistant, you've got to be big on forgiveness because we make lots of mistakes. But that's the atmosphere we have, and that's the air that we breathe, because that is exactly what we've been saved to and saved from.

And isn't it true, or sorry, isn't it often not true of churches and communities of believers together that quite often it's easy to be sharp, it's easy to be critical, it's easy to be judgmental and demanding?

And can I say it's always a bigger temptation in ministers to be like that, but we are a forgiving and must be a forgiving people that is part of the Spirit-filled reality of who we are.

[9 : 18] And therefore we should always be, I think, as well as a diverse people, because our DNA is the Lord Jesus Christ. We shouldn't be tribal.

I know we belong to denominations, but that should never make us tribal. It should never make us find our unity simply on the tribe that we belong to, whether that's a denominational tribe or a social tribe or a class tribe or a race tribe.

That is what's set apart the New Testament church. Our unity is not based on our Scottishness, our Presbyterianness, our ethnicity, our hobbies, our culture, our class, our profession.

Our unity is based on our common profession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. That should make us a diverse people, shouldn't it?

It should make us able to welcome and embrace and come together as a diverse people, a spiritual people reborn together.

[10:24] And that is what will help create a great atmosphere and culture for worship. So we share unity with gospel churches, whether...we could talk about the church throughout the world, the church universal, but I'm talking primarily about local church here, but we do share unity with other gospel churches.

That's important. We're not suspicious. We're definitely not sectarian, okay? We belong to a gloriously diverse worldwide culture of believers.

Let's not forget that. And let's not forget that while God might not be converting people in huge numbers here in Edinburgh at the moment, He's doing it all over the world.

Many, many people are joining the community of God's people. So we do share unity, but we are also committed to the local church because that's the New Testament model we have.

I hear sometimes people saying, I don't really need the church. I can't be bothered with the church. I just meet up with lots of Christians who are my friends. That's my gospel community. That's my church.

[11:34] Can I challenge you if you think like that? Because that's easy. That is really just a community of friends who happen to be believers.

The church is diverse. It's structured. We come together in worship and it has God's authority and God appoints those with spiritual oversight and we're different and we need to be forgiven.

If we're always just with our friends, it's not really church. It is maybe fellowship together as Christians.

But church is a different animal from that and it's much tougher and much more challenging and yet much more blessed. So it's a spirit-filled worship.

The second thing about it is apostolic worship. Verse 42, we're told that they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching to the fellowship, the breaking of bread and to prayers.

[12:34] So the New Testament church was unashamedly focused on God's teaching, God's word that came with the apostolic authority. Before the New Testament was finally completed, yet it was the apostolic message, the tradition that they brought, the teaching of Jesus Christ, the outworking of prophecy from the Old Testament.

The Old Testament itself has revealed truth. That was the foundational aspect of the worship of the New Testament church. They were committed to the teaching from God's word.

That's why the lectern here remains in the middle of the church and it's not at the side. There's symbolism there that's significant and it matches up with the big pulpit there.

You know, if I don't preach the truth from that, that top thing comes down and top of me. And I'm gone. That's why I don't go up there. But it's at the center, isn't it?

It's in the middle because we are unashamedly people who preach and believe God's word, that the gospel that the Lord Jesus Christ has given us, the message of Christ and Him crucified, we're not ashamed of.

[13:41] And it's the message that transforms in His power and His life. And we're learning people together. We want to, as leaders, we really want to make Sundays great.

We really do put effort. You might not think that, but we do put great effort into preparing our message and preaching God's word and praying through that.

And we need your help to do that because we can prepare a message and preach that message, but you've got to be fed on it and nourished. You know, there's nothing worse.

Is there for a chef who prepares a beautiful meal and puts it out on the table and it's not eaten? So we all have that. We're all involved in it. I know I've said this many, many times here, that it's not, you're not passive as you listen.

You're feeding and nourishing. You're coming prepared. You're asking God what He's wanting you to learn today. And we are all looking for our hearts to be transformed when we come together and worship.

[14 : 45] And you forgive us when that's not the case. But our response is so important, isn't it? What we, what you draw out from the word as it's preached, as it's sung, as we pray together, it's so important.

And I want to repeat a phrase that I mentioned earlier, a number of, a couple of months ago maybe in terms of that apostolic worship, the teaching, the preaching of God's Word is remembered in our knowledge.

Don't strive for knowledge beyond what we are willing to obey. So we're not just, we don't come to church. It's not a, it's not a consumerist activity, we're just wondering what I can learn.

What new things, what exciting new things will I be told today? It's not so much Gordon Blu cooking as Mincent Eyes. Okay, it's much more what is going to feed us and transform us for the day.

And what is God teaching me that I need to put into practice? Not that I will store away in some intellectual corner of my mind. But what is He, what light is He bringing into the darkness of my heart that is being exposed and needs changed today?

[15 : 59] Everything and our teaching, we strive and prayerfully to be inspiring, educational, but corporate together. It's not a show, it is God's truth.

He is our touchstone. It's apostolic and will remain focused always on the apostolic message of God's Word. That is foundational essential.

So it's spirit-filled, it's apostolic. But it's also in the third place, and it's from the same verse, verse 43. It's shared worship, really important.

Devote themselves to teaching fellowship and the breaking of bread into the prayers. Fellowship, coinonia, communion, it was together.

It has the whole idea of generosity, of giving and of being in one another's company, of sharing. And so our corporate worship, our Sunday mornings, is not a ritual, it's not just a habit.

[17 : 01] It is this shared coming together under God through the Spirit with apostolic teaching and fellowship with one another.

And I think that's increasingly important in the isolation that we've been forced into over the last couple of years. And even, and can I say it today, the online stuff, if you're watching online, is good. We're grateful to God for it. But it's never a preference. Can I ask you never to choose going online before coming out to worship with God's people?

I know there's reasons why sometimes we have to do it, and it's great we can. But can I ask you not to make it a preference? Because you're missing out, what you're missing out, you're missing out on sacrifice.

You're missing out on hassle. You're missing out on getting up and getting ready and getting out.

You're missing out on the frustration of having to speak to people and deal with people and serve.

[18 : 02] But remember, it's two-way. When we're not together, we're not eyeballing one another. We're not together and facing one another. We're not interacting with one another.

We're not... We're diminished when we're not together. Even the masks that you're wearing diminish our being together, because I can't see the expressions on your face, and I can't share the smiles or the grimaces that you have as I preach.

And it's so important, isn't it, that God has called us not only to face one another... Oh, sorry, to face Him in repentance, so we've come face to face with God. But we face to face with one another.

We come into contact, worship is about loving God, but also about loving one another. The core of who we are is that we are a shared people, a people who share grace and love.

It's the outworking of the Lord's command, isn't it, that we love Him and that we love one another and primarily in worship. And can I say that the meal, the sacramental meal that's spoken of here, the breaking of bread, sacrament, the Lord's supper, and also baptism, which is mentioned earlier, is really important and is significant.

[19 : 17] And the whole idea behind food is massive, isn't it, in the New Testament? It's massive spiritually. And the great thing about eating together is that you don't eat in cubicles.

You don't eat where you're face to the wall. You eat at a table, where your legs under the table and facing one another and fellowshiping with one another.

I just mean ordinary eating. But one of the amazing things about the first church that I was part of in Roskeen was it was a traditional church building and it had pews, beautiful American pine pews, light-colored pews.

And the first four pews were outstanding. Do you know why? Because you could turn them round, the backs of the pews flipped up to become tables. It was a remarkable piece of engineering.

And you could lift up a seat from the front of the pews so that you were facing the people in the pews coming to you. And there was a table, what a brilliant invention, for the Lord's supper.

[20 : 19] And I think that reminds us that not just the Lord's supper, but eating in general was an important part of worship. Now, as time has gone on, we've compartmentalized things much more.

And the Lord's supper is a sacrament that we engage in. We don't normally eat ordinary meals with it. But I think that was very much part of the New Testament worship, the love feast, where they ate together and they shared the Lord's supper together.

And I think that any New Testament church who worships will be sharing with one another. When we come together, food, generosity, forgiveness, it's all based around the cross, the sacrament that we're reminded of and has this future element towards it that we, even when we're gathered like this, this is not the end.

And this is not the final reality for us. It's pointing forward to something, a feast that will be far, far greater and far better together. Such beauty.

But what we want to do in our worship, as part of our worship, is to make shared meals part of our experience of the Lord's supper sometimes.

[21 : 35] So as a supplement to what we do on the Lord's Day once a month when we have the Lord's supper, we want to have communion together, fellowship, coinonia on a Wednesday evening, on the fifth Wednesday of the month.

So we kind of work in these things. The fifth is an extra Wednesday really, and there's four a year. So on that fifth Wednesday, we're going to have a fellowship meal together, and we're going to just worship together around tables, and we are going to celebrate the Lord's supper as well and do exactly what they did.

I love meal together in the New Testament as it was in the New Testament and share the Lord's supper together. Fellowship for us, I think, as is mentioned here, I think it's become a bit of an insipid word, kind of a bit of a soft word.

But it's a powerful word of sacrificial communion and shared life together, and that's God's model. And that's why, as I say, these things are all intertwined.

Hospitality is so important to us because it's in many ways, it's a powerful aspect of worship, closely linked. So it is a shared worship.

[22 : 48] That's why it's so important that you've made the effort to come out in the rain today. And I'm sure many of you thought, oh, what a hassle today. I think I'll just sit and watch it on the line and have to go early because I'm serving or I'm doing something.

Praise God that you came today. It's a brilliant thing. And it's a really important part of who we are and what we do. Shared worship is the third thing. Fourth thing is prayerful worship.

And awe came upon every soul, verse 43, many wonders were being done together by the people. And it goes on to say that they were praying together in so much of what they did, breaking of bread and two prayers.

There's nothing as the progressive revelation of the New Testament happens. There's no place where prayer becomes less significant for corporate prayer.

[23 : 49] The prayer of God's people together becomes a sideshow and added extra, the joint activity of the few. It's an absolute given.

The family together calling out to God without whom we are dead. Giving thanks, praising God and recognizing our need for Him to open the souls and the hearts and the lives of those who don't know Jesus Christ.

So we have that aspect of prayer that is so important in our lives and in our worship. The New Testament church came together for a great example of it, just in the next couple of chapters where Peter's imprisoned and the people join together in prayer to have him released.

And of course, he's miraculously released and they don't believe it. They can't believe that he is, I think. It's a vision that he's got out of prison and it's just a beautiful reminder to us of how little we actually believe in prayer, even though we do it.

And maybe you think that as well. Oh, well, I go along to the engine room or I get up early and one, two, seven, praying on Friday and nothing changes. We will see miracles when we keep praying and persevering in prayer to the one, when we recognize it's not ritualistic and not simply going through the motions, but is critical to part of our worship.

[25 : 11] I know seven o'clock on a Friday morning is inconvenient. Seven thirty on a Wednesday evening is sacrificial. It's painful. It's a pain in the neck. We would rather do many other things, but it's where we will make our battle cry.

It's where we will be encouraged. It's where we will sense God answering our prayers for the worship on a Sunday to be spirit filled and for us to grow and to develop and see new people. It's where we will get our wisdom to be able to share our faith with those who don't know the gospel of Jesus Christ. So prayer is critical to that New Testament church and to worship unto ourselves. And then the last thing is that it was joyful and awesome worship, which is what we strive after in our lives. We're told that with awe, the awe of God came upon every soul.

Many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And then later on we're told they were praising God with generous hearts, God giving them favor with all the people and the Lord added to their number.

[26 : 18] So there's this sense of joyful praise and worship together. Now the word there that's used is exuberant.

Exuberant worship when we come together. You'll go, what God has done is amazing. It's so easy to forget that. And yet there's awesomeness because of who He is.

Now I think sometimes we've associated reverence or awe with misery. And we've associated joy with flippancy.

And nothing could be further from the truth. There should be expressed and exuberant joy when we come together in worship fused with a holy reverence, which is not dull and boring.

It is what comes from the heart in our lives. Now I think culturally as doer, Presbyterian Scots, we're not great at being exuberant.

[27 : 23] We're not great at expressing it in our worship. And I think sometimes that's a shame. And it's something that we shouldn't be embarrassed about.

And it's important because it reflects what's in our heart. But you know, it doesn't mean it needs to be flippant or daft. It's just a sense of exuberant.

However you express your exuberance doing so in worship, but also reverent awe, awesome recognizing who God is. That's why song is vital in our worship.

That's why music is vital in our worship. It's why truth is vital. It's why your hearts and my hearts in preparation are vital. John Stott, when he's commenting or quoting, speaking about this passage, or this specific area, says, it's right to be dignified in worship, but it's unforgivable to be dull.

I really hate dullness. I hate when I preach a dull sermon. And I hate when there's a dullness about what we do that we just feel we're going through the motions we come and go and our eyebrows are raised because it shouldn't be like that for us.

[28 : 34] One of our priorities in the new or the updated card we're doing is related to worship and it's joyful Sundays. We're just focusing that as part of our priority, joyful Sundays.

You come, you're refreshed, you're renewed. I hope they'll be memorable. They'll be anticipated that you don't drag your feet, you don't dread coming to church.

It's not a terrible experience. And when we fail, you'll forgive us. But when you come empty, when you come sore, when you come gilly, you'll leave fed and restored and forgiven and renewed and assured and challenged in your faith.

So all these things are, I think, critical and important. I'm not going to say anytime it's gone about formal and informal worship. Both are exposed in this passage.

But in conclusion, there were people who, verse 42 says, were devoted to worship, devoted to worship. And that's what I want us to be as a community in St. Columbus.

[29 : 36] I know it's hard. It's really hard when we have to gather. We're not just a community to live together and near one another and see each other all the time. It's really difficult. It's a lot of work to be devoted to worship.

But it's what makes us who we are. It's what makes us new. It's what makes us united. It's what helps us to deal with tensions and struggles and battles that we have.

Enables us to look forward and remind ourselves it's just a taste of what's to come together. We battle today, but we look forward in worship and hope that our Sundays here are just a very small taste of what God has in store for us, a day of rest, a day of fellowship in a powerful way with God and with one another and the hope that we have in Him.

So devoted to worship and that involves that intensity of preparation and prayer and commitment to fellow failed humans who are saved by grace.

It's not just that you come to worship and there happens to be other people there. So we come to family with all the difficulties and struggles of that and we love them.

[30 : 49] We love one another because of who we are. So we're committed to one another, but it doesn't mean we're inward looking or insular. We're devoted to being outward looking.

The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. They found favor with the people. What does that mean? Well, it means that they weren't insular and they weren't sectarian and they weren't judgmental.

It means that they have this great outward looking desire and people noticed them. They found favor with the community. So that is a great challenge for us who are a gathered community.

How do people see us? Surely hospitality is one of the biggest ways that they will see us as we share our Christian friendships with our unbelievers who are our friends as well.

It's a great challenge. God saw fit to add to their number daily and I hope He feels fit to add to our numbers daily. Our mission is to be a healthy city center church in and for Edinburgh committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ and worship discipleship community and mission.

[31 : 53] The first of our four priorities that come from that is joyful Sundays. I hope that becomes and is the case. And the first of our four commitments that also in a sense kind of overflow from that is our commitment to the Bible, to prayer and to the sacraments.

That's part of who we are. Amen.