

Mar. 18, 2018

Lesson 3: The People Gave Thanks to God

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:1-9

Context:

Today in our scripture passage on acknowledging God, we move to the later portion of the Solomon and temple dedication piece. Our narrative picks up after Solomon has finished praying and petitioning for God to see the offering as pleasing. As Solomon concludes the prayer, there is fire from the heavens as the sacrifices are burned and the glory of the Lord fills the temple. In early recordings of David's offering, the same site was consumed by fire from heaven (1 Chronicles 21:26; 1 Kings 18), drawing a parallel between Solomon and his father as divinely approved.¹ The priests are stopped from entering the temple as the Lord's glory and light floods the place. The sight is so moving that all the people, the Israelites and priests, fall on their faces worshipping and giving thanks to the Lord proclaiming the goodness of God. They cry "God's faithful love lasts forever!"

It then becomes time for King Solomon to offer up more sacrifices including oxen and sheep. Like previous encounters in the Old Testament, the priests are given the tasks of blowing the trumpets as Israel watches everything unfolding. The offering of gifts is so huge that he had to move to the middle of the courtyard to dedicate as well with all the grain offerings, pieces of fat, and the burnt offerings.

This celebration though takes time. There is a festival assembled with all of Israel participating for seven days. The festival is so large that it stretches to the border of Egypt. On the eighth day, there was a major gathering. For seven days, they had dedicated the altar and then celebrated the festival for another seven days. It is a time of celebration, where the people of God celebrate the temple, a house of worship for God and a symbol of prayer for the people of Israel. It is where the Ark of the Covenant will dwell and the holy of holies will be. The temple is the symbol of Israel and the covenant established with God.

Application:

The most prominent theme of this text is to express thankfulness to God with heartfelt, awe-inspired worship. At this culmination of the temple's dedication, the focus is worship that is reverent and inspirational to those who have gathered there. It is not about the people or their preferences. It is about praising God and offering the best that is available.

For me, corporate worship is one of the most important aspects of our Christian faith. The older I have gotten, the more I have come to understand that worship is what holds a Christian community together. Even my call as Elder focuses upon worship as the chief role of my job. To proclaim the Word, preside over the sacraments, order the structure of the worship service, and then send out the congregation to serve the world takes all the elements of my call to their deepest purpose.

¹ Steven S. Tuell, "First and Second Chronicles," Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (John Knox Press: Louisville, KY 2001), 140.

Worship is not about us. It is not about our preferences; it is not meant to make us feel comfortable or cater to our demands like the brand of Starbucks coffee we prefer. Worship is never to be referred to as a production, something that seeks to entertain people and make them feel like they are passive participants. Worship is about lifting up our very best to God and acknowledging that the audience is first and foremost God.

However, that worship can come in different styles. It can be in the form of what we know as traditional worship where we have multiple scripture readings, old hymns, creeds that have stood the test of time, and the robes are brought out with stoles that reflect the season of the Christian year. It can also be in the form of contemporary music that includes newer songs, words and responses on screens, lights that fade in and out, and a more casual atmosphere. It can be a blend of the two or they can be as different as day and night.

However, the common thread that should run through these worship service is the glorification of God. There are praises, there is prayer, the sacraments are part of the service, and the Word of God is brought before the people of God. There isn't perfection, but by golly, we will try our very best to give thanks to our God who is God of all, regardless of worship preference.

How does your community worship God? What are the most important elements of worship for your congregation? One other thing to remember is that worship is also something that is about liturgia, which translates to "the public work done on the behalf of the people." We may be more familiar with the word liturgy, which we know as the words that root us in God in corporate worship together as we say words of power together. Lituriga though is about people using their gifts and talents in worship. This includes different ages, different genders, and different gifts being shared in a space of worship. Do your places of worship reflect this as well? Always keep in mind that someone has something that they can share with God and others and that all people are called to give thanks and sing praises to the Lord in some way.

Rev. E. Hunter Pugh
Associate Pastor
First United Methodist Church
1380 W. Main St.
Dothan, AL 36301
Office (334) 793-3555 ext. 240
E-mail: hunter@fumcdothan.org

