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9:00 a.m. Christian Education

**10:00 a.m. Worship**

Children's Sunday School during Worship



## "It's What We Do: Maintenance of Divine Worship"

**Psalm 95:1-7a**

**Rev. Ron Holmes**

**May 2, 2010**



Today is the third in our series on *The Great Ends of the Church* which are found in our *Book of Order*. Since "the Great Ends of the Church" doesn't necessarily inspire, we've entitled the series "It's What We Do." The Great Ends are really markers to what we as a church are to do, they are our identity, our purpose. It should be in our DNA. Recall where we've been so far: The first "great end," the first thing we are to do is the *Proclamation of the Gospel for the Salvation of Humankind*; then last week, *Shelter, Nurture, and Spiritual Fellowship of the Children of God*. And today our topic is worship, the *Maintenance of Divine Worship*. Our Scripture reading comes from Israel's worshipbook, Psalms, where there are many passages we could've selected. But for today, Psalm 95:1-7. (Read)

As most of you know, we are in the middle of a process exploring becoming a more missional church. Hopefully you know that by now if you've been around for, say, more than a month. In fact, a brief sidebar moment here, the Session met in a special meeting last Thursday night to begin a discernment process seeking God's direction for next steps in becoming more missional. A simple definition of missional would be outward focused, or connecting with the community around the church. So, we are in the middle of that process. Of the six *Great Ends of the Church*, the topic for today, worship, is the least missional. That's not to say worship can't be missional, but it is the least missional of the *Great Ends of the Church*. And I need to say here that when using the word "worship" this morning, I am speaking about corporate worship—that time, normally on Sunday morning, when a church gathers together and offers its worship to God. We've spoken many times of how we live our lives the rest of the week is also an act of worship to God, particularly because, in the *Great Ends of the Church*, that is what God calls us to do! *Proclaiming the Gospel, Sheltering and Nurturing the Children of God, Preserving the Truth, Promoting Social Righteousness and Exhibiting the Kingdom of Heaven* are all, first of all, very missional and, secondly, acts of worship because that is what God calls us to do. But for today, by "worship" we mean our corporate worship here on Sunday morning. And that is not very missional. I suppose we could take our worship out on the road, outdoors somewhere in a public place and that would make it more missional. It might also get us arrested, sad to say, but it would make our corporate worship more missional. But, as long as our corporate worship takes place here, in this

sanctuary, on Sunday morning...or any other day and time of the week for that matter, but as long as it takes place here in this sanctuary, it's not very missional. Which is perfectly okay. Missional and "attractive" is not an either/or proposition. It is a both/and. We seek, as a church, to be both attractive and missional, both inward focused—ministering to our members and visitors—and outward focused—seeking to learn more about the community out there that might otherwise never darken our church doors and explore ways we can connect with it. So that we might effectively...proclaim the gospel, shelter and nurture, preserve truth, promote social righteousness and exhibit the kingdom of heaven to the world. It's important we understand fulfilling the *Great Ends of the Church* as both an attractional and a missional process. Both/end, not either/or. And of the six *Great Ends of the Church*, our "maintenance of divine worship" is the least missional.

It is so because our corporate worship is what identifies us as distinctively Christian. We can certainly stand alongside someone of another faith, or no faith, and promote social righteousness. So also can we provide shelter or nurturing for others without necessarily showing our Christian faith. We can exhibit the kingdom of heaven in a generic way, the message of Christ not being proclaimed. There's lots of good news we might talk about without necessarily bringing up the good news of the gospel. And we might point to a variety of truths without pointing to Christ. But, worship, worship is all about the God we serve and our relationship with Him through Jesus Christ. Worship is what marks us distinctively as Christian. Worship is what we do.

In fact, we could say—as our Call to Worship this morning did—that we were made to worship God. Whether in how we live our lives (the private and missional worship we offer), or in our corporate worship, we were made to worship God. First of all, because God alone is worthy of our worship. Time and time again, in the Psalms—Israel's worshipbook—and throughout Scripture the people are called to worship God because of all that He has done and, therefore, He alone is worthy of our worship. It's the one thing we can offer to God...our worship. We cannot thank God enough for all that He has done for us, but the one thing we can do is worship Him. We were created to worship God. In fact, if we don't worship God we will worship other things. We were made for worship and the focus of our worship is God. Remember, the spectator in our worship is God. The question we ask each Sunday about our worship is not, what did I get out of worship today, but, what did God get out of my worship. We were made to worship God. It's the one thing I can offer to God.

Yet, we also benefit from our worship. Worship reminds us of who is God. Not us. Not others. Not things. God alone. He is, the Psalmist reminds us, "*the great God, the great King above all gods*" (Psalm 95:3). He is God...and we are not. The very act of worship is an acknowledgment of that truth.

We also benefit from our worship in that worship draws us closer to God. There is a sense of the holy, of the presence of God in our worship. Through the words and tunes of hymns and songs, through the prayers, through the Word proclaimed, through the Sacraments of baptism and communion, through the silence there is a sense of God's presence. We benefit from worship that draws us closer to God.

And we also benefit from our worship in that it re-focuses us, it re-energizes us. Life away from worship can be draining, circumstances drawing our attention away from God. Worship brings God back into focus and His Spirit re-energizes us in our worship together.

So, worship is what we do. The third *Great End of the Church* calls us to the "maintenance of divine worship." That word "maintenance" isn't a particularly inspiring word. Maintenance can bring to mind the patching and repairing of something old and worn, an old automobile for example, in an effort to keep it running. That is not what we're being called to do in this *Great End of the Church*. In fact, the church's worship is always changing and evolving to reflect the time and place of a particular people of God. It is not the maintenance of a particular style or type of worship. As Howard Rice points out in his book on this third *Great End of the Church*—[Worship] *is not preservation of all that has been done by*

*those who came before us. Otherwise, we Presbyterians would still be limited to singing the Psalms without accompaniment, to hour-long sermons, or even to a Latin mass" (p.7). Rather, the "maintenance of divine worship" means that a mark of the Christian church will always include worship. It's what we do. It's what we maintain, wherever the church gathers in whatever time and place.*

So, come let us worship the Lord. Wherever our journeys might take us throughout the week, come and worship the Lord. Whatever we might discover and pursue in our effort to become a more missional church, come, let us worship the Lord. Always there is that.