

The Walk: Worship
Psalm 148
Sunday, September 7, 2025

Why are we here? Why are *you* here? Now, of course, there are lots of different ways we could answer that question. In one sense, you're here because you exist. You are a flesh and blood person living in time and space. You are part of creation. You are here.

But that's not what I'm trying to get at when I ask why you're here. I'm asking, why are you in this place, whether you're here with us in person, or remotely. I mean, you don't have to be here. More and more people are choosing *not* to be here; choosing to forego Sunday morning church, or any church.

So, why *are* you here? Why are you worshiping with us this morning? And I think it has a lot to do with the first sense in which you, and I, and all of us are here.

As we know, God is love. Creation came into existence as a manifestation and outpouring of God's love. And the only appropriate response to the fact of being created by a loving God is thanksgiving, praise, and worship. It's what we see going on in today's scripture. All of creation is a reflection of God's glory. It cannot help but praise Him.

And, of course, we're part of that creation. But we are also a little bit different. We have a choice. Stars can't help but shine, birds can't help but sing, but we've been created in God's image; we've been created with free will. Unlike the rest of creation, we have the option *not* to worship God. Which once again raises the question, why are you here? Why are we here, worshiping?

Well, I think there are at least two reasons. First, it's the only proper response to the gift that God has given us of being here. Of being alive. It's only right and proper that we would recognize and praise God for all the gifts God has given us. While we may have been given the choice not to worship God, we also, unlike the rest of creation, have been given the privilege of consciously recognizing the magnitude of the gifts God has given us.

Although I don't know for sure, I can guess that a rock's ability to appreciate a moonless, starlit night, is pretty limited. We, on the other hand, have that ability; to stand in awe before the majesty of God's creation.

Likewise, we have the ability to understand and revel in the miraculousness of our physical lives; of how the cells differentiate to form different organs; of how the blood and nerve impulses flow; of the incredible complexity and intricacy of our brains, which even the most powerful AI still can't even approach.

And, to top it all off, we have the ability to appreciate the new, abundant, and eternal life that God has made available to us through the gift of his Son Jesus. We are enabled to experience life on an entirely different plane; to find peace in the midst of chaos, hope in the midst of despair, joy in the midst of sadness, and love in the midst of hatred.

Which brings me to the second—and main—reason I think we're here this morning. We spent the last four weeks learning about—and then last week living out—God's amazing grace. We learned about Prevenient Grace, through which God gets us to the point of accepting our need for Christ. We learned about Justifying Grace, through which God gives us the gift of faith so we *can* accept Christ. And finally, we learned about Sanctifying Grace; how, when we put our

faith in Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit; and how that Spirit works in us and with us to transform us into the image of Christ; to give us that new, bountiful, and eternal life.

And it is through worship, as well as many other spiritual practices, several of which we're going to talk about over the next 5 weeks, that we work with the Spirit to make that process of transformation happen.

Now, even for a lot of us who do attend worship on Sunday mornings, there's a nagging recognition that we don't *have* to be here. We may have been told our whole lives that we need to go to church on Sunday, but no one ever told us exactly why. I mean, if we know Jesus saved us, that ought to be enough, right?

Wrong. I know that I shouldn't load up on ice cream every chance I get, but I still do. I know that doomscrolling on my phone and keeping cable news running in the background as the soundtrack of my home life is bad for my mind and my attitude, but I often catch myself doing just that. Just knowing stuff by itself doesn't mean we're going to live like we know it.

To live like we know it, we've got to practice it. That's why worship is called a spiritual practice. By physically expressing gratitude, we em-body it. We get our whole selves, not just our minds, involved.

Here's an example of what I'm talking about. Growing up, my kids swam. A couple of the first things my kids learned from their swim coach was how to breath correctly and how to do flip turns. But even though they possessed that knowledge in their minds, they couldn't do it at first, or at least not very well. And even when they figured out how to do it, at first they still had to dedicate a lot of thought and attention to doing it right. However, after lots and lots of

practice, they got to where they didn't even have to think about the breathing and the flip turns. They just did them.

Sort of along the same lines, I learned to drive a car with a manual transmission. Before I could even drive, I understood where to position the shifter for each gear and how I needed to depress the clutch every time I shifted. But when I was first starting out, I had to direct almost all of my attention to shifting; to the point where the road got a little less of my attention than it probably should have. I absolutely dreaded having to come to a stop on an uphill. But after practicing it over and over again, before too long, I didn't even have to think about it anymore. It was just second nature.

One last example. Have you ever noticed how in an emergency, first responders run *towards* the emergency while the rest of us are running the other way? It isn't because they're just naturally braver than the rest of us. It isn't even a conscious decision. It's because they've practiced. They've trained themselves to head towards the danger so that when the danger appears, they don't have to think, they just go. Helping people isn't just an idea they have in their heads, it's something they have trained themselves to do automatically.

It's the same way with our faith. If our faith is just some ideas about loving God and loving people that live in our head, that's likely where they're going to stay. And, eventually, if we don't somehow make those beliefs physically real in our lives, they'll just end up fading away. When the moment of crisis comes, we're going to go the wrong way. That's why Jesus instructs us to participate in spiritual practices. That's why Jesus himself did them.

When we come together in worship, we're practicing worship. We're practicing gratitude and praise and thanksgiving. We're practicing loving God for *being* God, our creator.

We make the effort, set aside the time and attention, to physically show up, in person when we can and online when we can't. We repeat, out loud, so that we and others can hear, the words of the prayers and the liturgy. We participate in the sacraments and other sacred moments. We use our voices to sing the songs. Some of us raise our hands and move our bodies as we're singing.

In all of these things, we are practicing our worship. We are practicing our gratitude and praise. And, as we practice, we get better at it. We begin more and more to be the kind of people who are naturally grateful ... we begin more and more to resemble the one to whom we are offering our gratitude and praise.

Which is why so many of the people I talk to either before or after worship on Sundays tell me they really need this time. How, in the midst of the chaos of their world and their week, they need this time to recharge. And that's a pretty good way of describing it. I've got this phone here. It can't go all the time. Mine's got to recharge at least once a day.

Well, that's one way of looking at what happens when we worship. We spiritually recharge by taking the opportunity to focus not just our minds, but also our bodies—all of our attention—on the one who created us and loves us. We reconnect with who—and whose—we really are.

And, in doing that, we not only express our gratitude to God for all God has done for us, we ingrain that gratitude, praise, worship more and more into our beings. Every time, even if

just a little bit, we become more the kind of people who worship, and more like the *one* we worship.