

DCF:

I heard a story years ago about a man who came to church with the Sunday paper. He was there only because his wife insisted that he come. So, during the entire service, he calmly read each section of the newspaper. Everyone knew his heart wasn't in worship, and his life showed it.

Maybe you don't carry a newspaper or magazine to church each Sunday, but are you distracted? You skip a verse or two of a hymn and check your smartphone, or jot down something that you want to do later today. Or, your mind drifts during the readings or the sermon and you think of something else. Now, I've heard people say "I'm good at multitasking. I can do both on Sundays." No, you can't. You cannot focus on God wholeheartedly and plan your day at the same time. Studies have shown that there's no such thing as multi-tasking, just a rapid switching between tasks. And when you switch rapidly between tasks, you do poorly at both.

Today, we are in the Lord's house for one purpose, to worship Him. Are we? **“AM I WORSHIPING THE LORD?”** Let's check our hearts and our lives as we dig into the Word of God.

Part One: Check your heart

It was the best of times for the northern kingdom of Israel. And, the worst. If you looked at their economy, things were going fantastic for the merchants. Imports and exports flowed through their cities. Money was being made hand over fist. They had fancy homes and cabins in the country. Upscale wine and fancy foods found their place on their dining room tables. Ah, life was good for Israel!

Or, so it looked from on top. The wealthy were doing great, but the poor? Not so much. Wages were low, so low that some of the poorest sold themselves into slavery just to have food to eat. We've heard of the income gap here in the US, and that's what Israel was facing back then. How did it come to this? Didn't God command the Israelites to help the poor, to remember their brothers and take care of them? Yes, He did. You could say that the northern kingdom of Israel just didn't have the heart to follow the Lord's commands.

Oh, they still followed God's worship commands. They kept the feast days and the Passover. They made sure they followed the basic rules of worship. But those were just for show. Their hearts just weren't into it. They did it because they had to, and reluctantly at that! If they could just ignore the commands of God - if they could skip worshiping Him altogether - that would be just grand. More time to make more money.

God gives us an insight into their hearts. ***“When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?”*** Instead of focusing on the Lord on the Sabbath, they were focused on making money. These guys were irritated that God had taken away a business day. If they were honest with themselves, they would admit that they would much rather worship money than God. God checked their heart and knew this to be a fact. And, ***“The LORD has sworn by the Pride of Jacob: “I will never forget anything they have done.”***

Where's our heart at? The best definition I've heard for the word "worship" is "acts that show God is worth my time and attention." Worship is focusing our entire being on the Lord, giving Him the praise and honor that He truly deserves. That is what we strive to do each day of our lives, and even more intently here in this building. That's what our hearts desire, right?

And yet... and yet there are times our sinful nature and Satan try to cloud our hearts and dim our worship. We are tempted to value money over time with our Lord, and grab at that overtime our boss offers. Not because we need it, but because we want it. We see the ads for Rolex watches, the newest iPhone, the Audi and BMW, the trips to exotic places. We are tempted to value pleasure over time with our Lord and fellow believers, and skip church to go camping up north or just sleep in. We are sometimes tempted to think that church is just something we do. That's the way I was raised, so it's just a habit. I don't put much thought into it. I just go. Mom said church was good for us, but I don't really know why. It's just something people do in Green Bay. Can we say that our hearts are truly fixed on Jesus, or are just going through the motions?

Are we worshipping the Lord today? Let's check our hearts. Focus your heart on what you're doing here. Enjoy God's day of rest with Him. Slow down, listen, think, respond. Take a break from the disconnected, hectic pace of life, and rest in the presence of your loving Lord. Focus your heart on God!

"The LORD has sworn by the Pride of Jacob: "I will never forget anything they have done."

All of us need to repent of our wandering hearts. None of us has ever worshiped the Lord perfectly. Just a quick dip into our memories will show us this heart wrenching fact. With heads hanging low, we approach our God and say "forgive me my sins, especially the sins of my heart." And then, as we slump in our seats, ridden with guilt, Jesus is sitting right beside us. He turns to us and says "I died to pay for that sin, you know. And every other one, too. God the Father, God the Holy Spirit and I planned it before I created this world. I came from heaven, knowing that I would be seared with God's anger over sin. I knew I would suffer. I knew I would die. But I also knew I would rise again. Lift up your heart and worship the One who loved you. Worship, focus on me." Are you worshipping the Lord? First thing we do is check our hearts, right?

But worshipping the Lord isn't just an hour a week thing. It's a lifestyle.

Part Two: Check your life

The people Amos was blasting showed their hearts by the way they lived. These people deserve to be punished for their lack of love, their lack of faith and their total disregard for the Lord's will. He calls them out and lists the ways their hearts have corrupted their lives. ***"skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat."***

These people loved money more than the Lord, and it showed. They loved themselves more than their fellow human being, and it showed. Not only did they cheat, but they took advantage of the poor. They bought and sold slaves. They paid the lowest wage possible because the poor needed the basics of life and would take anything as pay. Something is better than nothing, and the rich took advantage. It may be legal, but is it moral?

It might be good to ask ourselves this question: Does my life show that my heart is focused on the Lord, or on myself? Am I being a good manager of my time and treasures, or am I sliding into greed? There's always that tug between the two, because we are both saint and sinner. Oh, we want to be good managers of our lives, so we pursue a side hustle and strive to have nice things and a comfortable life. But we must admit that not all our decisions about time and money are pure. We have a sinful nature tugging us to the dark side. All of us do! Be aware of this lifelong struggle, this battle that rages within us.

So, we want to check our lives, to make sure we are worshipping God with our time and treasures. We go back to the Word where God tells us to be content with what we have. We see that God has given us more than we need every day. So, what are you going to do with God's extra gifts? How can you worship God with what He has given to you?

Build His kingdom and serve others. Use your money to build His kingdom here at Messiah and worldwide through our Synod's mission offerings. Give towards MLC's campaign to strengthen our worker training system. Donate to a food pantry. Use your time to volunteer for a road cleanup, hospice care, big brothers or big sisters. Give a ride to those who don't have transportation. Use your talents to serve others. If you're a plumber, help someone who needs your talent. Help change a neighbor's oil or his flat tire. Give advice to someone struggling with their taxes or their garden. Share a recipe or two. Or, just be there when someone is having a hard day and just needs a shoulder to cry on. And do all these things without "monetizing" them. We worship the Lord in our lives when we do things for others because Jesus has done everything for us. It's one way we say thanks to God. And that is true worship!

We are here today for one reason, to worship the Lord. We show Him how much He's worth to us by giving Him our time and our attention. May today be a true day of worship, my friends.

AMEN