

“The Church We Want to Be: Worship”

The Rev. S. Shane Nanney – September 12, 2021

James 3:1-12 and Mark 8:27-38

What is church? Sounds like a crazy question. Everyone knows what church is. Or do they? Church is different for different people. We all come looking for something different when we enter the doors of any church. We all need something that we are hoping that God will help us find.

So, what do you need? What is it that you are looking for when you enter this building? Is it a safe place to sit and pray? Is it a place where we meet up with friends? It is a place to serve others? Why did you get out of your nice warm bed and come to church, either online or in person?

Before Covid, I read a study that in the fall there were over 20,000 children participating in soccer on Sundays in North East Ohio. Out of the 3 counties that make up NE Ohio, that is a lot of kids not in church. Then we you take that number and expand it to parents, siblings and grandparents watching the kids play, you are now up towards 100,000 people not in church. That is just with soccer. You can add football, gymnastics and all the other sports played on Sundays. If you want to get really serious, add also the professional and college sports played on Sundays that take people away from church. That number used to bring me such discouragement. So many people would wail that the church was dead or at least dying. How can we compete? What is wrong with these parents nowadays. In my day, we wouldn't allow sports on Sunday.

Yeah! I remember the old days when we had blue laws, and nothing was open. Movies, stores, restaurants, and such were closed. And then came Wal-Mart and it destroyed the blue laws, and the world has

not been the same since. People no longer went to church just because it was Sunday, and it was the only time to see people. People had choices and the church was just one of those choices. The privilege we held was just that, a privilege.

I have come to understand that people see church differently than when I was younger. The importance placed on church is also different. The church just has not realized it. We are still trying to be the church of the 1950's when we thought it was at its peak. When we built huge churches and had multiple pastors on staff. When we had multiple services and we had so many housewives to support and assist in the ministries of the church.

Times have changed. But what has not changed is our need for the church. Our online presence has shown this to me. People don't just watch our services at 9 and 11 am on Sundays. They watch all day Sunday through Saturday. There is no time that seems someone is not tuning into what I am saying and what we are singing. Because of this opportunity, people are now freer to do other things and still worship with us.

You need to hear this. Worship is still important to the people of God and the people that this congregation reaches whether they are members or not. People still hear the voice of God calling out to them to be connected. They still need and want to have their prayers heard and to feel that someone is praying for them.

Let that ooze into your brains for a minute. People still have a desire to worship. People are not necessarily leaving the church if the church is willing to work with them. When we think of church as only being at 9 and 11 am on Sundays, then we have lost touch with what church really is. The church is a 24/7 organization. We are open pretty much every day. We serve people every day. We pray for people every day. We study God's word, every day. We are the church, every day.

Only live worship happens at 9 and 11 am on Sundays. Worship happens when we come before God. Worship allows us to answer the same question Jesus spoke to Peter saying, “Who do you say that I am?” And we say that same words that Peter spoke saying, “You are the Messiah.”

Worship is what we make of it. When we sing just the right song, we feel the Spirit move deeply within us and in the room. But the Spirit also moves online, and in our homes, and in places we find others like us. The Spirit creates the need for us to be together in one place or in many places so that we are filled, heard, and loved. The Spirit calls us and burdens us until we find peace being with our God and one another.

When we think about the church we always wanted, we need to think first about our worship. We are not living in the 1950’s any longer and our worship of God should not look like it did back then. I am not Bill Gross, and this is not the same church that he led for so many years. Our worship today must feed us. It must serve us. It must inspire us to be what God has called us to be.

Worship will always be the first thing most people think about when they hear the word, church. It is only one aspect of what makes a church, a church, but it is very important. It is the time when we come before our creator, offer up our prayers, hear God’s message and God’s Word spoken and sung, and it offers us a chance to change our hearts.

So, how can you make worship more meaningful to you?

First, take seriously the fact that when you are worshipping, you are in the presence of God. Too often, if we can’t see, feel or hear something, it does not exist. For too many, that is how they feel about God. We are just going through the motions and nothing more. But God is here. God is watching you. God is listening in on your hearts. God knows what you are thinking, feeling, and doing. If you are not

first coming to the fact that you are worshipping the God who is present, then you are not worshipping. You don't have to sit in this room to be aware of the fact that God is there with you.

Second, you need to put aside all that is distracting you from God. There are many things going on in your life. There are worries, job and family responsibilities and the fact that you have other things to do. Either lift them to God to help you or put them aside so they won't distract you, or you will miss what God is doing in this room and in the lives of others around you.

Third, Listen. Hear God's word but then listen to what God is trying to tell you. What you don't understand is probably the area that God is trying to speak to you the most. God's word is not just the scripture reading, but in the prayers, the music, and in my sermon. Sometimes you can hear God speaking through the words and sometimes you can hear God saying something that is not even vocalized at all. God will speak to you if you just listen.

And fourth, put all that you have experienced, into action. What is God calling you to change, to do, to become? Only you can answer that. Only you can make the changes in your life that will truly benefit you and your family. Make the outward expressions of faith a reality that helps others. That can be seen in your giving, your stepping up to take leadership roles, taking on ministry opportunities, or just making decisions to help one person that you know. Allow the experiences, the smells, the sounds, the Spirit to move you to become better, to become more.

The church is more than worship, but worship is what connects most to the church. Over the next few weeks, we are going to talk more about making the church into the type of church that truly meets your needs and allows you to become all that you can be. Amen.