

Psalm 8

Lord, our Lord, how majestic
is your name throughout the earth!
You made your glory higher than heaven! [b]

2 From the mouths of nursing babies
you have laid a strong foundation
because of your foes,
in order to stop vengeful enemies.

3 When I look up at your skies,
at what your fingers made—
the moon and the stars
that you set firmly in place—

4 what are human beings
that you think about them;
what are human beings
that you pay attention to them?

5 You've made them only slightly less than divine,
crowning them with glory and grandeur.

6 You've let them rule over your handiwork,
putting everything under their feet—

7 all sheep and all cattle,
the wild animals too,

8 the birds in the sky,
the fish of the ocean,
everything that travels the pathways of the sea.

9 Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name throughout the earth!

Romans 12:1-2

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, [a] by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual [b] worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, [c] but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. [d]

Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

Alright! Good morning. By this point, many of us know the drill. And if you don't, that's ok. Just jump right in. For a few weeks now, we've been exploring how God's speaking to us through our mission statement here at CLC. Let's say those words together to help us recall the main themes. As Christ Lutheran Church, we're *a fellowship living and sharing the love of God through **worship**, service, wellness, and hospitality*. Today, our focus is worship. Well, y'all made it. We're at worship. Since we're doing that right now, I think we've got it. I'll just take a seat now.

Well, maybe not. This guy's always got something to say, right? But seriously, though we've just read a few verses from Romans, these are powerful, profound words that deserve our attention. "By the **mercies** of God," Paul says,

“present your bodies as a **living** sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your **spiritual** worship.” When we think about worship as a core identity of ours here at CLC, these three words play a central role. Mercy. Living. Spiritual.

Our worship centers on God's mercy. That's why we begin each service either with Confession and Forgiveness or a Remembrance of Baptism, because each focuses on God's mercy. It's by God's powerful mercy that our sins are forgiven. That God unites us with Jesus' death and resurrection in baptism is a wonderful mercy. That's also why we pass the peace with one another after we've confessed and received forgiveness. We get mercy from God and so we extend mercy to one another. That's one of the reasons I love that we take time here to greet everyone in worship. Mercy isn't just for the people that we know the best. Nor should mercy be withheld from someone because we've

got different political opinions or because of interpersonal divisions or just because we don't know one another all that well. In our worship, God declares that all are welcome, not based on our individual merit, but on God's mercy. Our worship centers upon God's mercy.

Our worship is also in our life of living sacrifice to God. This statement doesn't really jar us or surprise us because we aren't used to offering animal sacrifices in worship. If you are, then that's another conversation we can have later. But make no mistake. When you sacrificed an animal in Jerusalem's temple or at the altars of Greco-Roman gods across the empire, there was enough blood and enough pieces that there was no doubt: these animals were dead. Until the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the idea of a living sacrifice was a mutually exclusive option. It's an oxymoron. How can a sacrifice, something I kill and leave on the altar, yet be alive? In light of the Jesus event, though, our worship

is no longer built upon death, but built upon life. Our worship doesn't end with the sacrifice of an animal on an altar. Our worship begins with the sacrifice of God on a cross, an event that leads to divine life, first in the resurrection of Jesus, and then in the resurrection of each atom of creation. Our worship, as God's people, is and must be alive, not just during this hour on Sunday mornings, but throughout our entire existence.

As our worship is built upon mercy, as our worship demands life, our worship must also be spiritual. Now, when you hear this word, don't hear anything that seems to mean disconnected from the body. Spirituality is not about getting away from our God-given breath and sinews or about abdicating our skin and bones. Spirituality is about seeing God in everything, seeing these bodies full of the Holy Spirit, about seeing the Spirit of God that hovered over the waters of creation still hovering over the waters of the New River

and the running water in our homes and in the water that makes up the very cells of our bodies. Spirituality, spiritual worship, is about seeing God in everything, and more than that, seeing everything directed at God. Spirituality recognizes the power of a God who offers us the poetic description of a seven-day creation in Genesis 1, who is the same God that shows us the rocks and fossils that reveal creation is a complex process of billions of years, and spirituality sees those things as complementary truths of God instead of some between the Bible and science competition. Our worship sees that everything is spiritual, that God is in everything and everything is directed at God. Everything is spiritual, so as we're grounded in that mercy, as we're living a life of sacrifice, we must remember that there's not place we can't find God, where we can't experience mercy, where we shouldn't live a life of sacrifice.

There's one more thing about worship that we have to recognize, that we must remember, that Paul tells us clearly: worship isn't directed at us. Paul encourages to **offer ourselves to God and to the world**. We come to worship primarily to give, not to get. Worship is for us, in the sense that we are worshippers. Worship isn't for us, in the sense that it's directed at God. That doesn't mean there aren't benefits of worship for us; indeed, there are many. But our posture in worship is to be the ones doing the offering, not the ones doing the receiving.

And yet, Jesus is just too selfless to let us leave worship without offering more back to us than we could ever offer to him. We offer our confessions, and Christ offers forgiveness. We sing our words of thanks, and the Holy Spirit speaks God's Word of Life. We offer to God our living sacrifice, and God offers to us the living sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the one who died before he lived again.

We're a people based in this place of worship, where we find mercy, where we learn to live a sacrificial life, where we find that God's in everything and everything's directed at God. We're a people formed by God's selfless offering to us, so that even when we offer what little we have to God, the Lord returns to us blessings tenfold with the same hand that receives our offerings. That's what Paul reveals to us about the content of our worship: In worship, we meet God with mercy, with life, with an all encompassing spirituality, and as we offer ourselves in the midst of that worship, God shapes us in even more profound and powerful ways. So let's consider that all, then, in light of the first part of the mission statement. We believe that worship is one of the ways we're a fellowship that lives and shares the love of God.

What does it mean that worship is about fellowship?

Now, this doesn't mean that we should avoid personal times

of worship, of prayer and meditation and song and dance and all sorts of other forms of praise or lament. Those are very important. It means that worship is meant to bring us together, that personal prayer should eventually become voiced in worship, like we do with our prayer lists. That wisdom found through individual meditation can help to form our worship styles, which is how new music is composed and new sermons are written. More importantly, the things that happen in worship are meant to form us together into the image of God. It's a sort of check and balance system where, as we're formed together, we don't hear God's voice in a way that divides the Body of Christ. If we're by ourselves, we can hear whatever we want God to tell us. We can end up making God in our image, and that's how churches built only upon prosperity, or only upon exclusion, or only upon hatred of those who are different from us are built. But if we worship together, each of us helps

to show what God looks like, even if that challenges others, even if it changes us, changes me, because in worship, we become a fellowship. We learn that God shows up not just in wealth and health but in grief and sorrow. We learn that God's passion isn't exclusion, but inclusion. We learn that hatred has no place in the love of God, because our God delights in the differences we were given at creation. Like the Triune God, the Trinity whom we worship today and everyday, we become more of a fellowship when we spend time together in worship.

What about living and sharing the love of God? How is worship connected there? Let's ask the question another way: Where else do we learn the love of God? We hear God's love in Scripture, but there's also a lot of confusing stuff about ancient battles and bears attacking bullies – true story, check it out, 2nd Kings – and temple blueprints in the Bible too. We see God's love alive in the world, but we also

see hatred and violence and fear vying for our attention. In worship, though, we find the love of God without competition. Not everything sounds like love at first, but that's because we're hearing, seeing, feeling, and tasting love in all its myriad forms. The love that appears in justice and equality, the love that appears in special gifts and particular emphases, the love that appears in the death and resurrection we find in baptism and communion, the love we find in the real pain of confession and the true surprise of forgiveness. We learn to live and share the love of God because God lives and shares that love with us most uniquely through worship.

Worship is central to our identity because we meet the person who is love, Jesus, here in worship. We come to know that love, we're formed by that love, and we're sent with that love into the world. What's important about this for our identity, for our mission, is that this worship event is directed

at God, who is love, and that even as we offer ourselves to the God who loves us, we receive that love from God all the more. Worship is like showing up at Grandma's house with a homemade birthday card and leaving with a belly full of dessert, a pocket full of cash, a heart full of love, and that unmistakable scent of her generation's favorite perfume. Worship is where we learn radical generosity. We can't leave worship without carrying some trace that God has shown up and left us changed. Everything else that we talk about in our mission statement flows from a healthy worship life. We come to offer thanks for the mercy we've received, and we receive mercy all the more. We come to give the lives that we live, and we receive even more abundant life. The spiritual act of worship, the spirituality at the core of our very lives, sees God in everything and everything directed at God!

But in worship, we learn to recognize that God. We

learn to live and share the love of God in worship. We learn to have fellowship in worship from the Triune God, the very God who is the Trinity in fellowship with itself. And from here, we're sent with that God whose identity is love to do service, to share wellness, to give hospitality. Of course, it's in worship that we see God serving us, making us well, and making space for us. That's the radical generosity of our God that we receive not just as receptacles, but as givers, as those sent to emulate the generosity we find in worship, so that others might come to know this God as well. Worship is at the core of our mission because without it, we wouldn't know God, and we wouldn't know ourselves. Worship, my friends, is worth it. Amen.