

“Clearing Up Some Myth-Conceptions”

Psalm 46, Romans 12:1-2

Series: Believe Week 11: Worship

The Rev. Dr. Douglas C. Hoglund

The Woodside Church

January 15, 2017

If you watch enough movies, over time you realize that Hollywood tends to perpetuate certain clichés. Here are ten myths we get at the movies.

- If a movie is set in Paris, the Eiffel Tower can be seen from every window and all grocery bags will contain a long loaf of French bread.
- If Mom cooks a big breakfast for the family, everyone will be too busy to eat it.
- An action hero can endure the most ferocious beating and show no pain, but he will wince when a woman tries to clean his wounds.
- A detective can only solve a case after he is suspended from duty.
- If you decide to start dancing in the street, all bystanders will know the steps and join in.
- At least one of a pair of identical twins is born evil.
- Any laptop computer is powerful enough to hack into invading alien spaceships.
- When a gang attacks a hero in a martial arts film, each attacker patiently waits his turn.
- In a gunfight, several trained hitmen are incapable of shooting the hero.
- In a war film, if a soldier shows a picture of his sweetheart back home, he’s dead.

This week we begin the second part of BELIEVE: how to act like Jesus. For the next ten weeks we’ll look at the practical, spiritual exercises which help you grow more like Jesus. The first is Worship. Our key idea is “I worship God for who he is and what he has done for me.”

Like the movies, we have a lot of myth-conceptions about worship. Some people actually think worship is almost like a movie. We say we “go” to worship, just as we go to the movies. Like the movies, we think worship happens at a certain time (Sunday), at a certain location (sanctuary or theater). We view it as a performance we passively observe. We sit in rows of chairs or pews. Some people may even view their offering as the ticket price for the worship service. And afterwards, we go home and evaluate it like a film on Netflix. “Music five stars, prayers four, sermon two.” Let’s clear up a few myth-conceptions about worship.

MYTH: Only religious people worship. **TRUTH: Everyone Worships.** It’s not a matter of choosing whether you will worship or not. Everyone does. Even atheists worship. The symbol for the American Atheist Society is an atom. Guess what they worship? In the history of religion, most societies worship forces of nature – gods of wind, sun, storms, water – or forces of human

nature – war, love, wealth, birth, death. “Worship” comes from the old English word – *worship*. When we worship we declare a person, place or thing to be of great worth, to be valuable and precious to us. So the question is not, “Will I worship or not?” but “Who or what do I worship?” and “Is that person, place or thing truly worth my worship?”

MYTH: We only worship on Sunday in the church building. **TRUTH:** **We Worship All the Time.** The greatest commandment in the Old and New Testament is:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.
(Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37)

In essence, worship is simply saying to God, “I love you all the time with all my being.” The average American attends a worship service about once every two or three weeks for an hour. But I believe you love God far more than that. Imagine if you only loved your spouse and children when you saw them at dinner. Your husband or wife might wonder who you are loving the rest of the time. Worship is not an event you attend. It’s a lifestyle. You and I are constantly worshipping. Our goal is to love God every day in every way.

When Jewish people worshiped in Jesus’ day, men, women and children traveled from all over the country to the Temple in Jerusalem. They brought with them some livestock – oxen, sheep, lambs and goats. These were the offerings. Why go through such a hassle? Why sacrifice the life of your livestock? Your animal was your stand in – your substitute. You were spared the punishment for your sins because a lamb was sacrificed in your place.

Then one Passover Jesus, the Lamb of God, willingly sacrificed His life for all our sin. Once and for all, God gave His life so we wouldn’t have to offer an animal on an altar ever again. God doesn’t want you to give a dead animal sacrifice on an altar. No more substitutes. Now He asks you to give a living animal sacrifice – namely you. This sacrifice is not offered on an altar. Your whole life becomes a living offering, a living sacrifice. That’s worship. Paul says:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2)

Paul tells us to worship God everywhere, every day, in everything we do. Yet we only give God part of our lives. We give Him Sunday morning but not Monday morning or Saturday night. We’ll be followers of Jesus in the church building but not in the classroom, the locker room, the board room, the family room or the bedroom. When it comes to worship, we are often spectators in the stands, bystanders on the sidelines, moviegoers in the seats or maybe even missing in action altogether. God did not save us and set us free to be moviegoers. He wants us to move. Some may complain, “Then why do I have to worship with others? If I can worship God everywhere, I don’t need to sit in a sanctuary on Sunday.” That brings up another myth.

MYTH: I don't need to worship with others. I'm spiritual not religious. FACT: **We Worship By Gathering Then Going.** Some worry Americans are giving up on God. That's a myth. As we just saw, everyone worships all the time. What they are giving up on is institutions, especially the institutional church and organized religion. We live in the age of DIY – Do It Yourself. And that also applies to faith. More Americans want a DIY religion. They don't want to be told what to believe or what to do by some authority. That's understandable. That sounds reasonable until you realize that our biggest problem is I, me and mine. Our greatest trouble is selfishness and self-centeredness. So who do I wind up worshiping in a DIY religion? Me.

Following Jesus is not a ME thing. It's a WE thing. If our goal in BELIEVE is to act like Jesus, gathering for worship is what He did.

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. (Luke 4:16)

Even God Incarnate paused every seven days to gather and worship with other believers. Jesus models for us the importance of worshipping God, not ourselves. The first Christians were tempted to give up worshipping together. In the book of Hebrews it says,

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:22-25)

What are the blessings of gathering each week for worship?

- The God who is gracious rinses away our sin and cleanses our guilty consciences
- The God who is faithful revives our faith in Him.
- The God who is greater than all our problems restores our hope in Him.
- The God who is love releases us to share love and good deeds.

Gathering in this place reminds me that God is on the throne, not me, that God is in charge, not me. I need that reminder on a regular basis. All during the week, problems grow out of proportion. They expand to enormous sizes. They consume my thoughts by day and disturb my sleep at night. But on Sunday, when I gather with you in the presence of Almighty God, all those problems shrink back down to their normal manageable size. I remember that with God all things are possible. We gather here weekly to refocus our worship on the one True God. Why? There is a myth which may surprise you.

MYTH: We only worship God. TRUTH: **We Worship Many Things.** We say we only worship one God. So did the Israelites. Yet the Bible tells us their greatest and most frequent sin is idolatry. They worship the gods of the other nations: the storm god, the fertility goddess, the sun god, the moon goddess, the gods of the more powerful nations which conquer them. Why do they betray the one True God and go after false idols? This is what they see everyone else doing.

They believe these other gods will make them healthy, wealthy and wise, will give them life, liberty and happiness. Nothing wrong with that – except that these gods couldn't deliver.

We claim to worship only one God. Want to discover what you truly worship, what is highly valuable to you? Check out on what you spend your most valuable treasures – your time, your money and your attention. Your calendar and your checkbook can tell you the first two. Your thoughts reveal the third. Our days are actually a complicated dance of trying to please many gods. Everything we give our time, money and attention to can become our gods. Does that mean we must give up everything and give all our time, money and attention to God? No and Yes. No we do not need to give up everything. It was, in fact, God who gave us everything – to enjoy not to worship. This is not a competition – it's not God or your family, school or work. It's love God through your family, school or work. We have it backwards. Too often we worship things and use God. Instead, let's use things to love and worship God. Don't put God first above your family, school, work or yourself. Put God first in your family, at school, at work and in your life. What do I have to do to do that?

After we gather in worship, God wants us to go out and worship Him the rest of the week. As Paul says,

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

The world is always waiting to conform or squeeze us into its mold of selfishness and self-centeredness. We are always tempted to fall down and worship the gods of money, desire, and power. God wants to transform us into people who do His will. God wants you and I to make everything we do an act of worship. That means offering your work as an act of worship that is pleasing to God, raising your children as an act of worship that is pleasing to God, turning your marriage into an act of worship that is pleasing to God. The soccer field, the classroom, the office, the home, the neighborhood, the highways, the city streets are the sanctuary where you and I worship God. And we are not alone in this. We need each other.

A little known operation has been called the greatest rescue mission of World War II. To destroy the Nazis' oil supplies, American bombers flew through storms of anti-aircraft shells over southern Europe. Many American pilots were forced to parachute from their shot-up planes into occupied Yugoslavia, expecting to be captured or killed. When they landed, however, they were greeted not by storm troopers but by Serbian peasants. Their sole mission was to grab the flyboys and bring them to safety—before the Nazis arrived. Risking their own lives, the peasants fed and sheltered the downed soldiers. These rescued men were in friendly hands but on enemy soil. They still needed to escape.

The second half of Operation Haylard was a secret evacuation plan to a hidden airstrip where friendly planes landed to fly them to safety. The men had been saved from their enemy, but the journey had just begun. They still had to walk to freedom. Despite profound language barriers the airmen patiently followed the Serbian freedom fighters to the evacuation site. Amazingly, those Serbian peasants rescued every single American airman—over 500 in all.

For the airmen it was a journey of survival. For us it's a journey of faith. The One who saved us is now calling us to walk. It's non-negotiable. Though snatched from spiritual death, we soon discover that the Christian life isn't an arrival; it's an adventure. Christ rescues us then he points us to the path of following him.

So why don't we do that every day? We are too busy. I asked people during December, "How is your Advent? How is your Christmas going?" They replied with one word: Busy. I don't need to go through your To-Do list for the last month. You know what I mean. I'm too busy too.

In data collected from over 20,000 Christians in 139 countries (though mostly in America) and found that, on average, more than 4 in 10 Christians around the world say they "often" or "always" rush from task to task. About 6 in 10 Christians say that it's "often" or "always" true that "the busyness of life gets in the way of developing my relationship with God."¹

And who said busyness most often gets in the way of their relationship with God? Pastors. Maybe that's why Henri Nouwen, a Catholic priest and teacher said,

Once I am truly convinced that preparing the heart is more important than preparing the Christmas tree, I will be a lot less frustrated at the end of a day.²

As the New Year yawns before us with all its demands and deadlines the most important question to answer is: 'What is your will God? Thy will, not mine be done.' If you answer that question every day, every way, you will be worshiping God the way He wants.

Let's start practicing that right now. For the next ten minutes I want you to close your eyes and meditate on a single verse of Scripture. Please get comfortable. Relax. If you fall asleep I won't be offended and neither will God. After all the busyness that's passed and before all the busyness that is to come, I want to give you a little break, a chance to be still in the presence of God. I will say this verse and pause for a minute so you can listen in your spirit for what God is saying to you. Then I will repeat the verse, with a different emphasis. That little change will likely give the verse a new meaning and provide you with an opportunity for God to say something more to you. If you are ready, here is the verse:

Thy will not mine be done
Thy **will** not mine be done
Thy will **not mine** be done
Thy will not mine **be** done
Thy will not mine be **done**

Amen.

¹ "Survey: Christians Worldwide Too Busy For God," www.christianpost.com.

² Henri J.M. Nouwen in the New Oxford Review (Nov. 1986). Christianity Today, Vol. 35, no. 15.

