

Word of God: speak to us. Speak through us. Amen.

Congratulations! You’re all doing the spiritual practice of worship.

Check it off the list!

I never thought of worship as a spiritual practice; I thought of it as an event.

Worship is something you go to, right? An activity.

But worship isn’t something we “do.” It is an attitude of the heart.

The root of the word “worship” is “worth” –

so to worship is to ascribe worth to something or someone.

It is Worth-ship. And the One to whom we ascribe ultimate worth is God.

Worship, even though it’s an activity and an event, is really all about God:

our expression of gratitude, of praise, of submission, of blessing to this One
from whom we believe all good things come, and to whom we belong.

So, like Turning to Jesus, like Learning and Praying,

worship also takes place in the context of a relationship with God,

With the God who made us, and loves us,

and is our end as well as our beginning.

Here are some of the ways we encounter God in worship.

We encounter God in holy space – we don’t always worship in sacred,
set -part spaces, but in our tradition, we often do.

This place was crafted to speak to us of God,

to lift our spirits into the presence of God.

We encounter God in the sacred Word.

We encounter God when we praise God in music and prayer.

We encounter God in the bread and wine,

in the Sacraments we enact in God’s name.

Supremely we encounter God in each other,

which is why worship is not a solitary activity.

You can worship on your own, but the spiritual practice of worship is communal.

God’s love is poured out in community; we see Christ in each other.

We become the Body of Christ as we are gathered,

and we carry that out when we go, so the world can see Christ.

We can see all the movements of worship in the story we heard a few minutes ago. It was a Sunday. Jesus' followers were still in utter grief at his crucifixion on Friday, when they expected he would be spared, or save himself. He wasn't – he died, horribly. The worst possible scenario happened. And that Sunday, there were reports circulating that the women who had gone to his tomb early that morning to dress his body for burial, had found it empty. So now it looked like his body had been stolen, on top of the horror of Friday.

Only now more reports started circulating that people were seeing him; People had seen him, had talked with him, he had talked with people, Had said, "Go on ahead to Galilee – I'll meet you there." They did not know what to think.

And two of the disciples headed to a place called Emmaus – we don't know what their errand was, or if they were just getting out of Dodge. They were walking down the road, talking about these things, just as you and I on our way to church or in the hallway may talk about what's happened in our lives this week, what we're feeling like. And a traveler walked up to meet them, and he said, "What are you talking about?" They were like, "Have you been under a rock? You don't know what's been happening this week, how the one we thought was the Messiah was arrested and crucified and actually died, and now, even worse, his body is missing.

And the stranger explains to them their own scriptures, and how what they're going through now shows up in the scriptures, and was foretold, and how God is acting in the way he said he would be. And he says, "How slow you are to believe what God said through the prophets!" He opens the scriptures for them. That's what I hope happens for us – in hearing the Scriptures read, In singing about them, and in my attempts to proclaim the Good News in them - I hope it relates to what is going on in your life, and sets your life in the context of God's great marvelous plan. We talk about trying to make the scriptures relevant to us – but in worship we discover it's we who must be made relevant to the revelation of God, what God has been doing and saying for all time, even as our interpretation, guided by the Spirit, is ever unfolding.

So the men were so compelled by the conversation they were having with this man, that they got to Emmaus in no time; seven miles just flew by. And they said, "It's suppertime. Stay with us, for evening is at hand, and the day is long past. Eat with us." And so he came and sat with them at supper, and bread was brought. And he took the bread, and he blessed, and he broke it – and their eyes were opened. They said, "Whoa – where have we seen this before?" And they realize – "We didn't recognize him with our eyes, but our spirits know. This is Jesus!" And at that moment, he vanishes. And they say, "Were not our hearts burning within us when he opened the Scripture to us on the road?" And they ran back, in the dark, seven miles, to tell.

So we come from all kinds of places and in all kinds of moods, and we're often not aware of encountering Jesus in church. I mean, if I were aware of it, if you were aware of it every week, there wouldn't be an empty seat in here. We need to accept his presence by faith, and open ourselves to experiencing it.

When we know we've had that encounter – and I know someone here who had a powerful encounter with Jesus last week, when we did that silent prayer – and I could see after church that something was different in her face – just in those few minutes, he showed up, big time. When we have those encounters, we run and tell other people. We can't help it. It's not because we're supposed to, or because Jesus said, "Go and tell," it's because "Oh my god, do you know what just happened to me?"

So this story contains in many ways what we are invited to experience in worship – To come with all that we are, and to be blessed, and to go and take that blessing out.

Now, if we're already doing it, do we have to work on this practice? Aren't we already there? Well, with all the spiritual practices, it's not just the doing it. It's making yourself available to God in it. It's opening your spirit to receive more and more of God's spirit. It's letting God make space in you to hold more and more of God's love for the world. So yes, we can do more than show up at worship. We can be more intentional.

At the beginning of the service ask, “Jesus, where am I going to encounter you in worship today?” Just asking that question is going to make you more alive to feeling it when Jesus makes himself known.

Could be in the sermon, could be in the eucharist, could be in passing the peace; could be in passing the plate – you never know. Could be at coffee hour
Be intentional and then note what you experience.

The way to practice the practice of worship, as with all of them, is to do it with Jesus. So when you sit down in your pew, invite Jesus to sit by you, or say, “Where are you in here?”

And when we pray, be conscious that you are talking to Jesus – talking to God with Jesus, through Jesus, through the Holy Spirit.

And when you’re coming to communion – it’s such a familiar movement, we can do it in our sleep – but what if we intentionally wake up to what we’re doing, Say, “Jesus, I want to be filled with your life when I receive that bread and wine. I want to experience you.”

What the experience will feel or look like, I don’t know.

Just asking the question makes us more open, more intentional.

So as we practice the practice of Worship, let this, like all the spiritual practices we are learning, be a way to know God, to be known by God, and out of that to make God known.

Amen.

Luke 11:1-13

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him. 'Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.