

Live to Give: Worship Sunday, 11/11/18

1 Have you ever had a child pick a dandelion and present it to you as a gift? Or maybe you've given a dandelion to someone? I remember exchanging dandelions with my kids when they were old enough to know that the dandelions were weeds, but young enough to get lost in the wonder and love of spontaneously presenting a flower to their mom or dad. Children often know something that adults tend to forget: The real action isn't in the gift, it's in the giving and the heart of the giver. Most of us don't really want a vase of dandelions, but oh, to receive the love that comes with each one, wouldn't you take as many of those dandelions as your arms could hold?

Today we're continuing to ask the question, "How can I live to give?" Living to give means cultivating an attitude of the heart that expresses itself as joyful giving. Whether it's the giving of service, sacrifices, hope, worship, or grace, right giving is marked with child-like joy and love. God has blessed us so that we might have the joy of expressing our love for God and others through the sharing of our blessings.

2 Before we can imagine growing in our living to give worship, we have to wrestle a bit with our understanding of what worship is. Is worship something that happens in churches on Sunday mornings? Is worship something that happens in fields of dandelions? Is worship something that happens with other people? Is worship something that happens when we're alone? I think the answer to all those questions could be yes. In fact, in some ways, this child offering a dandelion reminds me of worship more than a picture of a church building, sanctuary, or altar. And that's because while we often remember to worship God in what we know of God's revealed truth, we sometimes forget to worship God in spirit, with the totality of our being, not just our heads. God wants worship that fully engages our hearts with a child-like, dandelion-giving kind of faith.

3 It turns out that God's people have always had to wrestle with the meaning of worship. Worship in the Garden of Eden involved walking and talking with God in the Garden. I'm not sure if there were dandelions in Eden, but we do know that there were plants growing there for food, and that worship included bringing a portion of the harvest to God as an offering. Abraham worshipped God by having regular conversations with God and by building altars and making sacrifices. After the Exodus from Egypt, Moses and the

Levites worshipped God on behalf of the people in a Tabernacle, a large moveable tent, and worship became pretty complicated, in part to disciple God's people into a new way of living that centered on God, and also to set God's people apart from others who weren't God worshippers. Worship was something that happened on the go as the people picked up their stakes and moved on.

4 By the tenth century BC, King Solomon built a massive, permanent Temple in Jerusalem, and worship became something fixed to a single place. Fast forward almost a thousand years, and the temple had been destroyed and rebuilt, and a competing temple had been set up in Samaria. I suppose we could think of that as an early denominational split, before the Christian Church even existed! This is the context of our next Scripture reading, as Jesus discusses the meaning of worship, reminding the Samaritan woman, and us, that worship was never really about the building or the congregation, but the heart of the worshipper and the God being worshipped. I'm reading now from the Gospel of John, Chapter 4, verses 23-26 in the Message. **{Read passage}**

5 So Jesus, in his typical fashion, laid out some pretty provocative ideas about worship in those short four verses. It doesn't matter where you worship. It doesn't matter what tribe you identify with. God wants you to be who you are, simply and honestly, and live a life of adoration for God. You might get the impression that Jesus is agreeing with the increasing number of people I talk to who say something like, "I believe in God, I just don't believe in going to church." Like many misunderstandings, there's an element of truth to that. Our worship of God is something that needs to be expressed in our daily lives, outside of the church building and in the communities we live and work and play in. But for so many other reasons, the idea that we don't need to regularly show up and participate in a worshipping community is tragically flawed. We still need a place to gather and worship, even if the days of the old white church on the hill may be over.

6 I've always been attracted to campfires. We don't have a fire pit in our back yard, but I love building campfires. I love the warmth of the fire, the yellows, oranges, and reds of the flames, and the hissing, popping, and crackling of the wood. Worshipping with other people is kind of like gathering around a campfire. Fire comes from a chemical reaction involving the wood, the air, and heat. The fire will burn indefinitely provided those three

things are present in abundance. But kick one of those embers out of the fire ring, and what happens? It loses the heat it needs, and the fire dies, long before the fuel runs out.

When we worship together, we gather in the presence of the Holy Spirit to have our hope and joy ignited for the journey ahead in the remaining 167 hours of the upcoming week. There's something about doing this together that seems to matter, to both God and to us, and God honors and blesses our presence in worship with God's presence in worship, fanning the flames of our hearts. Just like an ember that's taken out the fire, we need to gather together to experience the presence of the living God in ways we simply can't when we're alone or distracted by the routines of our daily living.

How do you feel about showing up to worship? Is it something you do once or twice a month out of habit or obligation, or it is something that you look forward to, knowing that the flames of hope will be kindled in your heart by hearing God's Word, by singing God's praises, and by bowing before God in prayer?

7 We need to worship together because Christianity is, at its heart, incarnational. Incarnation is when spirit is made into flesh. The savior we worship and follow is Jesus, who is God, spirit made flesh. Just as Jesus came to earth in person, we need to show up, in person, for worship. That's why we ask our **members** to promise to be present in worship and other significant times in the life of our church as a matter of priority. That's why I'm asking every one of you to make a promise this year to grow in your commitment to live to give worship.

When you walked into worship this morning, did you realize that in doing so you were walking in the footsteps of Jesus, making into flesh that thing we are made into when we gather, the body of Christ? There would be no Christmas, no Easter, no forgiveness of our sins, and no church, if Jesus hadn't shown up and given us the gift of his presence. When we show up to worship Jesus, we're gathering up all our attitudes and experiences, our hopes and griefs, and putting flesh on them. Worshipping together is incarnational. Just as every Sunday is Easter Sunday, a celebration of the resurrection, so too is every Sunday Christmas, a Christ-Mass, a celebration of the incarnation of God. When you show up in worship it matters- to God, to the other worshippers gathered here, and to the world you'll return to after this hour is over.

8 Do you recall the video we began the service with? Worship is a 24/7 way of life that we engage in wherever we go. Cathy Townley, one of the coaches for our MCCI Teams examining our Sunday morning schedule and worship design, calls worship our bridges to the communities around us, especially those nearest our building. Like most bridges, our worship bridges need to be built for two-way traffic. The gathered community goes out from the worship services into the world, carrying the hope of Jesus and the mission of bringing that hope to those who've lost it or never found it. The community returns to worship, bringing with them those they've invited to come along. Like all bridges, our worship bridges need to be maintained and sometimes, even rebuilt, with wider lanes or more on-ramps.

Your church leaders will be taking a closer look at our worship bridges over the next 6 to 9 months, with a particular emphasis on our mission to reach the young families in the neighborhoods closest to our church. Some small things have already changed, like the way I now dress a little less formally. Some larger things may change, like our Sunday morning schedule. But the heart of worship always remains the same, rooted in the truth of Jesus as revealed in the Bible, given life in the Spirit, and made flesh in the Church. Worship is the incarnational adoration of Jesus with our true selves, both within our gathered worship community and outside in the every-day world around us.

9 From the very beginning, we were created and called to give our hearts over to a passionate adoration of God. God is fully present with us today- right now, right here. Are you? Have you brought your full being with you to worship? Are you offering the fullness of your life, worshipping God in spirit and in truth?

I wonder if there might be someone here today who's received a fresh word from God, perhaps a heart nudge that you're feeling you need to respond to today. Or maybe you feel God's Spirit stirring your spirit, and you're grateful to be in the presence of the divine. Or maybe you're here and you're still looking, still waiting to experience the presence of God. Wherever you're at today, please bow your hearts with me in prayer.

God of wonder, you are amazing beyond words. Speak to our hearts today. Give us the child-like wonder to offer you dandelions. Kindle the flames of our hearts and send us out in worship to share the flames of our faith with our hurting and hungry neighbors.



Buffalo United Methodist Church

...serving people for Jesus Christ so that we all may know joy!



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