

An Experience Of Worship

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[0 : 00] Looking at the 17th chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, and this morning I can invite you, in fact, to look at it because you will find a new blue Bible in your view.

And if you turn in the New Testament section to page 17, there you'll find Matthew chapter 17. And if you have one eye on it as we go along, you perhaps will understand better what I'm trying to get at.

But basically it's talking about an experience of worship, a most profound experience of worship. And you know that it's in the context of Jesus teaching his disciples.

I said last week, and I want to say again, because I think it's so profoundly important for us as a congregation to grasp this simple but very fundamental fact.

And that is that Jesus at this time in his ministry was constantly being forced and shoved by the religious authorities, the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, who were all very much threatened by the things he was saying, and they wanted some kind of defense, some way of proving Jesus to be wrong in what he was teaching.

[1 : 28] And they were crowding him. There was another group crowding him, and they were the people who were hungry because they had been fed. They had been given bread to eat.

And everybody knows from all the history of man that the source of bread becomes the source of power. And I wonder how much we're prepared to choose our candidates next Tuesday on the basis of which one of them promises bread fundamentally.

And the fact that they are perhaps reduced to that because we won't take anything from them. What happens then is Jesus is pressed by those who want bread.

He is pressed by those who are terribly threatened by the things he's teaching. But the thing that he counts most important is to escape from both those pressures and to find time to teach his disciples.

So that the fundamental ministry of Jesus prior to his crucifixion was to teach his disciples.

[2 : 42] And I believe that this is still the fundamental ministry of the church. We can't argue all day long with our opponents because their arguments are endless and not altogether unworthy and not altogether unwholesome.

But we can't give all our time to that. We also want to see a steady progression of miracles taking place in the church. We want to see people fed.

We want to see the sick healed. But fundamentally, the ongoing and continuing, unswerving task of the church is to teach the disciples.

And you are baptized into Christ's church to be a disciple and to be taught. And Jesus doesn't require a situation which is like this, where you're all set there in straight lines, and I'm in the pulpit hammering at you.

But what he requires is that by his Holy Spirit, in every situation in which you find yourself, you are willing to allow him to teach you.

[3 : 59] And he is willing to teach you in every situation. So that's the context. The other part of the context of this story is that it's up in the north country near Caesarea Philippi, and chapter 17 opens with them going up a mountain, which if the students of scripture are right, was a mountain that was 9,100 feet high.

So you can compare that, if you like, to Grouse Mountain or Whistler Mountain or whatever you like. But they went up into the mountain in order to be alone.

And it was there that the story takes place, which I now want you to follow as I read it from chapter 17 of Matthew's Gospel, page 17 in your few Bibles.

And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah talking with him.

And Peter said to Jesus, Look, it is well that we are here. If you wish, I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.

[5 : 40] He was still speaking when, lo, a bright cloud overshadowed him. And a voice from the cloud said, This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

Listen to him. And when the disciples heard this, they fell on their knees and were filled with awe. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, Rise and have no fear.

And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. And as they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, Tell no one of the beast until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.

Now this is the transfiguration of Christ. And that word transfiguration is the word that we're familiar with, if you are familiar with it, with it as his metamorphosis, something fundamentally changed in Christ or in his appearance.

Note these things about us. This, I believe, was Jesus' way of leading his disciples into an experience of worship.

[7 : 06] And when I read this, and know that I have to share it with you this morning, my longing and my desire is that Christ might lead us Sunday by Sunday as his disciples into such an experience of worship.

We might go on to the hill of the Lord. I know compared with other places, Sharmacy isn't a very high hill, but it is a little bit of a hill.

And as we come here from week to week, may we have this experience of worship. And I feel further that to carry on as a disciple of Jesus Christ without ever having an experience of worship must be a very deadly procedure indeed.

So that I think it is God's purpose that you and I, as we are seeing it here this morning in this church, that it is God's purpose towards us, that we should have an experience of worship.

And I wonder how folks we come. Look at what happened here. First, he was careful to take with him only three of his disciples, Peter and James and John.

[8 : 39] And they went, it's hard to say why. The story later on in the chapter ends up with the disciples who got left at home finally having a lesson in their own powerlessness when an epileptic boy was brought to them and they were unable to do anything for him.

But these three went up the mountain of transfiguration with Jesus. And his face, that is, Jesus was changed so that his face shone like the sun.

His garments became white as light. And there was Moses and Elijah talking with him. I don't know whether you find this helpful or not, but I'm going to tell you this.

And one of the professors, Moll, who was one of the great assessment professors in Kenya, who has retired me. He said that he thinks the story of the transfiguration is to help men understand what death would have been, what the passing from this world to the next would have been, if sin hadn't entered into the world.

And if there's a glimpse of power, we might have been changed from this world to the next. Without that, the last man is having to be faced.

[10 : 18] We have a glimpse of it. That's just for you to think about. There's nothing to demonstrate categorically, but that's what it is, but it has that quality to it.

That Jesus' face, his countenance was changed, his clothing was changed, and they saw with him Moses and Elijah. Remember, Moses and Elijah had been long since gone.

Moses to a place that nobody knew, and Elijah for whom a chariot had swung low and come to carry him home.

But this was such. These two men were seen by the disciples. Now there's something essentially unscientific about this story, I grant you.

And if you're bringing your scientific mind to bear on it in order to understand how this hallucination was developed, save yourself the trouble.

[11 : 17] I don't think that you'll get very far in that line. But this was obviously the personal, the deeply personal experience, not of one man, but of three, Peter and James and John.

And later in the second epistle of Peter, he talks about this experience again as something which was fundamental to his understanding of who Jesus Christ really is.

And so it's probably fundamental to our understanding to come with awe and reverence to this experience. Now, we live in a day when the potential that you and I have for transcendental

experiences is being exploited through various forms of cults and group therapy and various other ways to induce in people what seems to be a totally irrational but very real experience.

That was not the experience that Peter and James and John had. They weren't discovering their human potential, except perhaps their human potential to worship.

They were seeing the person of Jesus Christ transformed before their eyes. They, in a sense, were able to see behind the visible world to the invisible.

[12:58] And the power and glory of God had the curtain drawn back for a moment so they could see who Jesus Christ really is.

And they saw him in the company with the one through whom God had given the law and the one who spoke as God's prophet, the greatest of the prophets of the Old Testament.

So that they had a very highly exalted picture of Jesus Christ. And that's what Jesus wanted them to experience.

The thing that you have to understand, too, I think, is that you have to see this story in terms of the fact that Christ was facing in this frail human flesh a very profound period of personal suffering.

And that this may very well have been for him a gift of God's grace to reassure him and to strengthen him as he, in the flesh, was to choose to die upon the cross.

[14:18] So there you have a mountaintop experience. Three disciples. Jesus transformed before their eyes. And then, in the midst of that experience, Peter said, Let me build here three food.

One for Moses and one for life and one for you. He said to Jesus. Which was an impulsive thing. And Peter was an impulsive person.

And he wasn't taken up on it. But it does remind us of the fact that the moment of worship isn't something that we can encase. It's not something we can transfix.

It's something which is given to us and is taken away. And in that moment, all we can do is to be lost in wonder, love, and praise as God reveals to us the person of Jesus Christ.

Peter, while he was yet speaking, a bright cloud appeared. And out of this cloud, a voice came. Now, people who read the scriptures aren't unfamiliar with this.

[15:31] Because the presence of God with the children of Israel was always there in the form of a pillar of fire by day and a pillar of cloud by night.

that God manifested his presence among them in that way. And God manifested his presence on this occasion by a bright cloud.

And it was then that the disciples fell on their faces and were filled with awe. What they had seen and what they saw when the bright clouds surrounded them meant that they dropped on their faces full of awe.

And that's the moment of worship, isn't it? If we could come to that moment week by week where the person of Jesus Christ being lifted up before us, we recognize him with awe.

We don't try and comprehend all that it means with our minds. We don't try and explain it as a phenomenon. We are brought to the place of worship.

[16:50] And it was here again that they heard the voice which came out of the cloud and said, This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.

Listen to him. The same kind of thing that was spoken at his baptism was spoken again here just before he was to face his trial, his cruel death by crucifixion.

And it was both to inform and edify the disciples and to confirm and strengthen Christ in his steadfast purpose of obedience to the will of his heavenly hope.

And caught as they were in that moment the disciples having fallen on their faces Jesus came and very graciously touched them and spoke to them this word Arise Arise and have no fear.

And they arose and saw no one but Jesus only. The thing that they had been involved in and what manner of experience it was none of us can determine but that they all bore witness to it we have to respect.

[18:19] And very often I hear from people like you of highly personal and highly subjective experiences some of which I'm skeptical about and some of which I'm profoundly jealous of but it happens to people and I think we have reason to be respected of highly personal experiences.

So I don't want you to tear this story apart by analyzing I want you to be respectful of the witness that Peter and James and John have made to this experience which has been confirmed in Matthew and Mark and Luke and in the second epistle of Peter in the pages of the New Testament.

And the lovely thing is that this experience of worship concludes with Jesus touching the disciples and saying to them arise have no fear and they were aware only then of his presence alone.

And so that it's Jesus who brings them into an experience of worship and Jesus who brings them again into the experience of the reality of this world.

Well that's what that's how Jesus taught his disciples this experience of worship. And what is our experience of worship to be?

[20 : 04] Well I think we can learn a great deal from this story as to how you and I could come week by week to share an experience of worship as we meet together in Christ's name.

First it was given to disciples. There's no use in a sense wasting a dramatic experience like this on people for whom it has no meaning.

It belonged to disciples and I think the experience of worship must belong to disciples. Secondly this experience of worship has about it the whole perspective of the revelation of scripture in that it wasn't just Jesus whom they saw but it was Moses the lawgiver Elijah the prophet and Jesus that you see in them the whole sweep of God's dealing with men through men.

It's not a place that you can linger when Peter longed to build three booths. I don't suppose he knew what to do but we all I think want to make of the place of worship something which is rock and stone or even wood and leaves a simple booth to mark the place but it's the experience of worship is not tied to a place it's tied to a person and that person is Jesus Christ.

it is nevertheless a place where God was able to speak to the disciples and when he spoke to them he said this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased he didn't say to them something that they had never heard before he didn't say to them something that they couldn't understand because what he said to them they already knew but they were afraid to believe and many of us are in that position where we know a great deal about God but we are afraid to believe and God has to work in our hearts and lives not to teach us things that we don't know but to give us grace to believe what we do already know that's how God has to work in our lives he didn't tell them something they didn't know they already knew who Jesus was but he wanted to encourage them to believe he and you see what happens for us as Christians in this 20th century is most of us have people like you and [23 : 25] I have in our minds and in our hearts some awareness of who God is and how he's made himself known and who Jesus Christ is and what the cross means we know a lot of those things but we are afraid to believe it to really trust God for what he has made known to us so that we understand the purposes and promises of God but that step of faith of believing in him we have never taken and that's what he wanted to help the disciples do to believe what they already knew and that's why discipleship is open to each one of us here is because we already know enough but we need the grace of God that help us to believe him and that help us to trust him that's why we need

I believe this experience of worship in which God is able to speak to us to encourage us to believe what in some measure we already know and so we come to this church week by week that it might be for us a mountain top experience it might be an experience of all as the person of Jesus is transformed before how appropriate that the choir would sing this morning Jesus joy of man's desire a person who obviously in those very words had an experience of Christ transfigured before his eyes as Christ as the object of man's joy and delight and worship him my prayer for us as a congregation is that we might come together and that we might see that we may see Christ transformed before our eyes and we might worship him that he might bring us to this experience of worship and then he might touch us and tell us not to be afraid the verse for the day from the gospel for the day that I want to leave with you then is this where

Christ says these things I have spoken unto you that you might have peace in the world you will have tribulation but be of good to you I have overcome the world and tribulation is not something mysterious that happens to martyrs in lions dens tribulation is a word which means pressure in the world you will have pressure but be of good cheer I have overcome the world let us pray who who help who of who who could who in two who I ■ who are in chest and got them

Lord Jesus Christ, as you revealed yourself to your disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, so revealed yourself anew and afresh to us, we may fall before you in wonder and awe and worship. As you revealed yourself to their sight in some way that we don't understand, so you revealed yourself to their hearing in a way that we do understand.

[28 : 28] As we know with our minds who you are, we ask that you give us grace to believe in our hearts and to confess with our lips.

Amen.