

WORSHIP AND THE WORLD  
A Sermon for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity, 2011  
On the Text: Propers for the Day  
By the Reverend Doctor Randolph Constantine

In our Collect for today, we ask God to “pour upon us such love toward Thee that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all we can desire, ...”. The first things that you hear in any service of Holy Communion are Alcuin’s Collect for Purity, and immediately after that, you hear either a reading of the Law, the Ten Commandments, or a reading of the Summary of the Law, which is what you heard this morning.

When, on a first Sunday of a month, or any other time, I read the full Ten Commandments, after the reading of each of the first nine, we ask God for mercy, saying, “Lord have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.” After the reading of the Tenth Commandment, we change our prayer slightly to, “Lord have mercy upon us and write all these Thy laws in our hearts, we beseech Thee.”

When I read the Summary of the Law, we ask God for mercy three times in what is called the Kyrie Eleison, which is the Greek for “Lord have mercy (on us)”.

The similarity between asking for mercy when we hear the Law read and asking in our Collect for today for God to fill our hearts with love for Him depends on the central thought of the Collect for the Ninth Sunday after Trinity in which we recognize something that is very important in that Collect: “Grant to us Lord, we beseech Thee, the spirit to think and do such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee, may be enabled by Thee to live according to Thy Will.”

Where did this come from, this idea that we humans can’t do anything that is good, that would satisfy God, unless He predisposes us to do it and then helps us to do it?

The answer to that question is a phrase you may not have heard; or if you have heard it, it may not have been something you heard recently. It is called the Doctrine of Grace. In some churches, the Doctrine of Grace fell out of favor back in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, so much so that James Montgomery Boice wrote a book titled, *What Ever Happened to the Doctrine of Grace?*

This “Doctrine” is defined for us in part in Romans 3:23-24: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. The 19<sup>th</sup> century commentator, Arthur Pink in his little book, *The Attributes of God*, describes the Doctrine of Grace succinctly in one short paragraph:

“There are three principle characteristics of Divine grace. First, it is *eternal*. Grace was planned before it was exercised, purposed before it was imparted: “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. (2 Timothy 1:9) “Secondly, it is *free*, for none did ever purchase it: [24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:](#)” [Pink quotes Romans 3:24 from the KJV, the same as what I quoted above from the ESV.] “Thirdly, it is sovereign, because God exercises it toward, and bestows it upon, whom He pleases: [even so might grace reign](#) (Romans 5:21). If grace reigns, then it is on the throne, and the occupant of the throne sovereign. Hence the “throne of grace” [as seen] in Hebrews 4:16.”

We always need grace because of the sin of Adam, and it is freely given to those of faith. It is simply a matter that we shall have a hard time making much progress in trying to conform to image of God’s Son if we don’t recognize that we need God’s help in doing so, that when we ask for His help, we then need to use that grace immediately to do something positive in order to forge a new link in a chain of habit that will get longer and stronger as we add to it. One of the best ways we can do this is through worship, but what is worship? There are a lot of answers to that question.

I read a lot of varied things to find ideas for sermons. In the past few weeks, I have been reading a lot about the topic of worship: books that ask questions such as: “What is worship?”; “Why do we, or should we, do it?”; and “Is preaching a part of worship?” One book in particular has attracted a lot of readers recently. It is *Worship by the Book*, the Book being the Bible.

This book tries to answer the question, “How does the Bible define worship?” Four different authors, ministers/theologians from four very different traditions try to give answers. On some points two or more may agree, while on others they may all disagree. The book was edited by D. A. Carson, a very well-respected theologian who has written over 40 books, and who wrote one of the four articles that make up the book. The other three writers are: Mark Ashton, who is a Church of England priest and the vicar (rector) of Round Church at St. Andrew the Great in Cambridge, England; R. Kent Hughes, who is the pastor of College Church in Wheaton, Illinois; and Timothy Keller, the pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City.

Carson came from a Baptist background, but is now called a “Reformed Evangelical”; so I am not quite sure what that means. Ashton is, of course, Anglican, although the Church of England has moved almost as far from its roots as has the Episcopal church. Kent Hughes is of the “Free Church” persuasion, which seems to mean sort of Baptist, sort of Bible church. Tim

Keller is the most easily identifiable as a Presbyterian. Their views on worship just about cover the subject. One thing they all agree on though: Worship is important.

I came to the conclusion that I needed to preach about worship today because of what we ask in the Collect, that God will help us to love Him so fully and so deeply, as the Collect says, “above all things”, which is another way of saying, “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind;”. Our worship of God should come from our love for Him and from our knowledge of His attributes: that He is infinite and all powerful, that He is our Creator Who created the universe and all that is in it just by speaking it into existence. Our urge to worship God comes from this awe of Him and our gratitude that he thought of us and created us in His Image. Not only that, but that it is God in the person of Jesus Christ who not only created the world, but keeps it from falling apart into nothingness as we are told in Colossians 1:16-17 [16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities- all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.](#)

Our God is definitely worth worshipping. In fact, the origin of word, worship, has to do with worth. The word was formed in Old English by putting together the word, **weorð**, which meant *worth*, and **scipe**, a suffix that meant a quality or a relationship somewhat like the way we use *ship* as in frinedship. Its use as an adjective meaning deserving honor or esteem goes back to the year 888, but its use as a verb meaning to honor, adore, or give reverence to God or something holy did not show up until about 1200. As a noun with the meaning we give it today, *the reverence or veneration we give to God in services and ceremonies*, *worship* did not show up in writings until about 1300. But does it mean just that and only that nowadays? I don't think so.

That is what Carson and his fellow writers of *Worship by the Book* are concerned with. Carson, who wrote the first of the four parts or chapters of the book tried to set the stage by putting forth a working definition of worship. It is too long to quote in full. I'll quote the first sentence of it and condense or even omit some others. Carson begins his definition with this sentence: **Worship is the proper response of all moral, sentient beings to God, ascribing all honor and worth to their Creator-God precisely because He is worthy, delightfully so.**

He should have stopped right there. The rest of it is really a description of what we do, or should do, in worship, why we do it, and some other implications of that first sentence. Here are some of those implications and descriptions. He said sentient beings rather than humans because angels are sentient, are not human, and are required to worship God; see Hebrews 1:6 on that.

Our worship should be God-centered, and certainly not Man-centered. After the Fall of Adam, our worship of God responds to the provisions He has made for our redemption under the New Covenant, namely the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross, so that our worship must also be Christ-centered as well as God-centered. We have only a glimpse of what life with God was like before the Fall, just the first two chapters of Genesis. Worship then was the unadulterated love of their Creator in a direct relationship with God without fear or shame, but sin changed all that.

Thus, worship changed into something God had to prescribe under the Old Covenant with Moses, with prescribed sacrifices and fasts and feasts. However, the OT writers knew that going through all the prescribed motions without having one's heart in the right place was not true worship. God shows this through Isaiah in Isaiah 1: 11-17 where He begins with this: **Isaiah 1:11-13** **11 "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. 12 "When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? 13 Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations- I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.**

Solemn assembly, done strictly by the book, according to God's instructions to Moses but with iniquity and an impure heart was worthless to God. It was not true worship; it was a form of idolatry and was an abomination to God. But even then, in the day of Isaiah, God offered the possibility of repentance. In the same passage, in verses 16 and 17 and 19 and 20, God says, **Isaiah 1:16-17, 19-20** **"16 Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, 17 learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the father-less, plead the widow's cause. 19 If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; 20 but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."**

We worship God precisely because he is worthy, delightfully so. Our duty is to love God and enjoy Him forever. After all, He created us for His pleasure, and He has told us through Ezekiel He takes no pleasure in the death of anyone Ezekiel 18:32 **32 For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live."** Here, God is not speaking of the death of the body, but rather the death of soul that is spoken of in Revelation as the second death; and turn means repent, to turn away from sin and back to God. He wants us to enjoy Him

and for Him to enjoy us. Thus our worship must not be just correct in form; it must come from the heart, with love and obedience. We must not go after other “gods”.

St. Paul says in our Epistle lesson that we are baptized onto Christ’s death so that we are free from the slavery of sin. In that baptism, we were baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. If we remember this, we should also see that our worship should be Trinitarian, always realizing that it is through the Spirit that we receive the grace that motivates us to worship, that our Communion with the Father is mediated by the Son through the help of the Spirit, the Helper, the Paraclete, who dwells within us.

Worship entails not only adoration, but also action. What kind of action? Carson puts it bluntly: “We are to do everything to the glory of God.” Everything? Yes, everything! In this service, each Sunday, we say, “and here we offer and present unto Thee, ourselves, our souls and bodies to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto Thee. We give God all that we are. We should get the idea that everything we do in our lives should be thought of as an act of worship. This means whether we are alone or together in a company as we are now. Our worship should happen both singly and corporately in church or any other group. As the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews put it in Hebrews 10:24-25 [24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.](#) “Not neglecting to meet together” We may not have any copies of orders of services that took place in the early days of the church, but this tells us they did meet together, just as does St. Paul in Colossians 3:15-16 [15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.](#)

This is true worship, worshipping God singly or together, with prayer, with songs, and with the reading and exposition of Scripture. Why the reading and preaching? Simply to learn more about our Creator whom we love and revere. Is preaching part of worship?

In one of the parts about preaching, I came across two statements, one I had heard before, but had forgotten; and another that will perhaps shock you as Anglicans. Both of these were made by the same man who thinks that preaching is very important.

Here is the possible shocker: R. Kent Hughes, who is known as a great preacher said this about so-called “human-centered” worship: “The human-centered approach has some

unfortunate characteristics. Preaching, for example is often reduced to a 15 or 20 minute homily, and Bible exposition is jettisoned in favor of lighter, more topical fare.”

Looking at that statement in the light of knowing that some churches think that any sermon more than 12 minutes long is waaay too long, makes me wonder just how well taught the congregations in such churches are. For them, I wonder, is a church service a service of the worship of God, or is it merely a socially acceptable prelude to a time of socializing?

But Hughes made this statement too: “A preacher should preach with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.” He says this because we do need to see how our faith informs our responses to what is happening in the world, to see that sermons *should* speak to what is going on in the world, and to show us how the Gospel and other teachings of Jesus Christ tell us how we should react to what is going on in the secular world.

Even though we have to live in it for a while, our primary relationship is not to the world, but is to God. “**But our citizenship is in Heaven**” said St. Paul in Phillipians 3:20. So, our relationship to God is to be worshipful. The whole Bible tells us that, from the Children of Israel’s fear before God on the fiery mountain to King David’s wild dance in the street; but the Psalms are particularly rich in telling us about worship.

The psalms are songs and prayers and prophecy, and we should not ignore them. Psalm 95 invites us to worship: Psalm 95:6 **6 Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!** Psalm 100 invites us to sing Psalm 100:1-2 **Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. 2 Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with a song.**

Some churches think that only singing is worship. I think they do not understand the richness of worship. But it is verse 9 of Psalm 96 that tells us worship can include holiness and beauty, with great respect. That to me is the essence of worship. Psalm 96:9 **9 O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: let the whole earth stand in awe of Him.** Come, let us worship the Lord our God.

AMEN!