

What is Worship?

Today we're starting a new sermon series looking at the character of God and what our response to him should be. Today is our first one and we're thinking about "What is worship?" So, when you think of the word "worship", what comes to mind?

When we think of worship it's easy to imagine what we're doing now in church – a mix of singing and prayer – and, yes, this is worship. It's an act of worship. But if we limit worship to what happens in a church building, then we lose the heart of what worship is.

So, let's rewind and think about the word "worship"

Worship really means worth-ship, being worthy of something. As the reading from Revelation says,

"You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honour and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created
and have their being."

When we look at what God has done and is doing, we see that his actions demand a response. And that's what we do in church, we declare what God has done and we sing his praises. But is that really enough?

Now sadly at the moment we're in a time of mourning for Queen Elizabeth. As a keen historian, looking back at history it's easy to see a stark difference between the way she reigned and a large number of other monarchs of the past. As a Ruler, it would be easy to say – look, I've got the crown, I've got the throne, I'll do the bits I need to do but otherwise I'll be happy living the life of luxury. It would be easy to go through the motions. But that's not what Queen Elizabeth did. As she stated in a radio broadcast on her 21st birthday, "I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong."

Not going through the motions, but a lifetime of service. Think about what says to us as we think about worship? Is it a going through the motions or is it a lifetime of service?

Take a moment to consider what God has done for us. He created the world – and keeps it going. And this world that he created provides us with all that we need. He made each of us individually and uniquely. To each of us he has given different gifts and talents. We're all blessed in different ways. And on top of that, through the cross, God has done all that is necessary for us to be forgiven for what we're done wrong in this life, through the resurrection of Jesus God has offered us the gift of new life and life eternal. There's not a lot that God hasn't done for us!

So, what is God worth to us? How can we show this worth? What does it mean to worship God?

There are a few occasions in the Old Testament where God tells his people what type of worship he wants – and what he doesn't want. He says "I'm not interested in your sacrifices and your festivals" they'd become cut off from the reality of life and had become stand-alone events – instead he says, "true worship is to care for the widow, the orphan and the stranger." True worship, real worship is practical and grounded. It takes the love and the blessings that God has for us and it seeks to take them and share them with the world around.

These are some words that Queen Elizabeth used at Christmas in 1975...

“We are all different, but each of us has his own best to offer. The responsibility for the way we live life with all its challenges, sadness and joy is ours alone. If we do this well, it will also be good for our neighbours.

If you throw a stone into a pool, the ripples go on spreading outwards. A big stone can cause waves, but even the smallest pebble changes the whole pattern of the water. Our daily actions are like those ripples, each one makes a difference, even the smallest.

It does matter therefore what each individual does each day. Kindness, sympathy, resolution, and courteous behaviour are infectious. Acts of courage and self-sacrifice, like those of the people who refuse to be terrorised by kidnappers or hijackers, or who defuse bombs, are an inspiration to others.

And the combined effect can be enormous. If enough grains of sand are dropped into one side of a pair of scales they will, in the end, tip it against a lump of lead.”

True worship is expressed in our willingness to answer the call of God to be a servant to the world. True worship is sacrificial of ourselves, of our time, our money, our effort. True worship takes us out of our comfort zone and seeks to do good for our neighbours. True worship is a lifetime of service to God and the world around us.

Questions to ponder:

When you think of the word “worship”, what comes to mind?

What has God done for us and what does this show us about our worth to him?

What areas of our lives currently show God’s worth to us?

Are there some that don’t reflect God’s glory?

What can the life of service of the Queen teach us about worship?

“True worship is a lifetime of service to God and the world around us.” How far do you agree with this statement and how does it challenge you?