

WORSHIP AND LOVING ONE ANOTHER

Her name was Cheryl. She had been going to church for years. But on that particular Sunday it was different. At least that is what she told me. “I was sitting in the pew. I had my hymnal open. But I couldn’t worship. I couldn’t sing. I couldn’t pray. All I could do was listen to the people around me. And that was enough. I felt drawn to God. The people around me sang for me when I couldn’t sing. And they prayed for me when I couldn’t pray. And they carried me to God.”

You see, Cheryl had been going through a tough time. Her husband was sick. Her son had been killed in a car wreck. Her daughter was away at school. She was emotionally and spiritually drained. When she came to church that Sunday she had no energy with which to sing or pray. That Sunday she was even questioning her faith.

She listened, though, and as the people around her said, “We believe in one God, the Father almighty,” she was encouraged. And when she heard them sing, “What a friend we have in Jesus,” she knew Jesus was there for her. And when they prayed, “Our Father, who art in heaven,” she knew they were saying the words for her. Even though, on that particular day, she could not say the words and no song would come from her lips, yet the words and the songs of others spoke to her and spoke for her.

No one knew what they had done for Cheryl that day. But they had been there for her, exactly when she needed it.

This summer we have been talking about worship. Worship is all about God. It is loving God with all your heart and soul and mind. It is being close to God and delighting in God and being renewed by God. Worship can happen anytime, anywhere. In fact, it should. You can worship God while walking in the park. You can worship God while rocking your daughter to sleep. You can worship God while giving your best at work.

So why do we need to come to church? Why is it so important that we gather together each week to pray and sing and read the Bible and receive Communion? One very important reason is Cheryl. Every time we gather there is someone like Cheryl who needs the support of others. We need each other!

Three times I have taken youth to national youth gatherings. And the reaction of the kids is always the same. They get excited when they see 30,000 other young people expressing their faith in God. So often young people feel alone, especially when it comes to having faith in God. Just to be around other people who share their faith is so vitally important to them. We need each other!

None of us is strong enough that we can make it through life on our own. Life is tough. The world is tough. There is so much that drains our faith and drags us down. We need the support

of others - whether we realize it or not. And whether we realize it or not, when we gather together for worship, we support one another.

Too often, though, we are like the disciples in the story we heard today. We focus on ourselves. "Its about me," we think. We don't think about coming to worship to help others. We think about what's going on in our lives, we think about our schedule, we think about what we need to get done, we think about how we are feeling. "What's in it for me?" we ask. "How will this benefit me?"

Jesus said, "Those are the wrong questions to be asking. Its not about you. Its about being a servant. Look around. There are people who need you. They are sitting next to you. And across the aisle from you. In front of you. In back of you. They need you to be here. They need your support. They need your prayers. They need the songs of your lips. They need you to join them at the Lord's Supper.

They need you to be here for them, just as Jesus is here for you. Jesus came to be your servant, to give his life as a ransom for you. He did not ask, "What's in it for me?" He asked, "What can I do for you?" And when the answer was "the cross," he willingly bore the cross for you.

When you were baptized you were connected to Christ. In fact, you became part of the Body of Christ. And that has all kinds of implications for your life, including the fact that it is through you that your neighbor experiences the love of God. It is true, the person sitting next to you and across the aisle from you and in front of you and in back of you experiences God through you. When we gather, we don't gather as individuals. We gather as the Body of Christ. We are connected not only to Christ, we are connected to one another. And we need to support one another.

George, who cannot hear, needs to see you sitting in the pew with him. Melissa, who has come to worship for the first time, needs to see that you are excited about being here. Josh, who isn't sure about this business of being a Christian, needs to hear you express your faith. Cheryl, who is going through a tough time, needs you to say the prayers and sing the songs for her.

Why come to worship? Love drives us here. Love for God. And love for the neighbor.