

**Davidson College Presbyterian Church**  
**Davidson, North Carolina**  
**Rev. Claire George-Drumheller**  
**Ephesians 5:15-20**  
**Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**August 19, 2018**

Our scripture reading comes from the Book of Ephesians. Historically, this letter has been attributed to the Apostle Paul, but scholars have questioned that authorship. Some still believe that Paul wrote this letter at the end of his career while he was in prison. However, more scholars now hold that the author of this letter was not Paul, but an admirer of Paul; the author knew Paul's writing and sought to apply Pauline thought to the situation and church in his own day.<sup>1</sup>

The writer of Ephesians was responding to his own context. The Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 CE, and with the temple destruction came the disappearance of national Israel with its temple cult. The church, this group of Jesus-followers, had grown, and the majority of followers were now Gentiles.<sup>2</sup>

Ephesians celebrates the writer's vision for the church. Throughout the letter, language is drawn from early Christian hymns and from Jewish scriptures.<sup>3</sup> The author charges the church to recognize Christ as its Lord. And the author also charges the church to recognize its own status: the church as the Spirit-filled community that brings the presence of God to the world.<sup>4</sup>

*<sup>15</sup> Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the most of the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup> Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, <sup>20</sup> giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 5:15-20 (NRSV)*

As I think back on my life of faith, I remember a variety of worship services I have participated in. I remember exactly which pew my dad, my sister, and I sat in every week, while my mom sang in the choir. I remember worshipping at the services of witness to the resurrection for my four grandparents and for my aunt. I remember worshipping in Montreat's Anderson Auditorium at Youth Conferences and at Worship and Music Conferences. I remember worshipping with a multitude of Presbyterians at General Assembly in San Jose. I remember my wedding, when the congregation took vows to support my spouse and me and when we exchanged rings in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I remember my ordination service, when the congregation stood around me and laid hands on me. I remember my experience at the US/Mexico border, when I took communion with my siblings in Christ on the opposite side of a border wall. I remember worship here at DCPC in May when we welcomed the Confirmation class, when they professed their faith publicly and joined the church. I remember UKirk Sundays, when Davidson College students led you in worship.

There is no question about it: worship is important for the Christian community. Sometimes, we go to worship in search of something. We hope for a word of encouragement, a word of healing, some support for our wearying hope. Sometimes we go to worship because our faith is at high tide; we go to church to celebrate an abundance of faith. Sometimes we go to worship to be supported by others, or sometimes we go to be a support.<sup>5</sup> But I'm going to make a bold statement here: *worship is the most important thing we do.*<sup>6</sup> Worshiping our God in community is the most important thing the church does.

The roots of Christian worship are in fact older than Christianity itself. The very first Christians were primarily Jewish. They continued for a time to worship on Saturdays in the temple and in the synagogue. They also began to meet on Sundays, when they gathered as followers of Jesus to share a meal; this will sound familiar: in the meal they took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to those gathered, as Jesus commanded his disciples to do and as the church continues to do to this day. For a few generations, followers of Jesus continued the pattern of worshiping in the temple or in the synagogue on Saturdays with the larger Jewish community and then gathering separately for a meal on Sundays, which they began to call the Lord's Day – the day on which Jesus was resurrected. By the time this letter to the Ephesians was penned, the Christian community was no longer welcome at the temple; by the time of Ephesians, most of the Christian community were not Jewish, but Gentile. Without ties to the temple, Saturday worship began to wane; the meal on Sunday – the Lord's Day – was combined with worship. A new practice was born, a practice that we still hold today: the community of Jesus-followers gathering for worship on Sunday.<sup>7</sup>

Worship is central to our identity as Christians today, and worship was central for the Ephesians community. Worship is so central that the writer does not even name it in this passage. The word "worship" does not appear in these six verses, but the sense of worship runs throughout. Worship is not explicitly identified, but the worship of God underscores each phrase.

The book of Ephesians does begin with words of worship. Ephesians starts with a doxology: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ..."<sup>8</sup> Just as the letter begins with words of worship, so the letter ends: "Peace be to the whole community, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>9</sup>

The letter begins and ends with worship. In the middle the writer explores God's sovereign plan throughout history. The writer explains to the church how life in Christ is new, and transformed, and all of these exhortations are set in between these words of worship. Ephesians begins in worship, and from worship, it moves into practical implications for day-to-day life: how being a Christian shapes reality. And from the examination of daily reality, the writer is moved back into worship. It is a pattern: from worship to daily reality and back to worship.

As you explore the announcements and the calendar in today's bulletin, you will see that there is a lot going on in the life of this church. For the elementary school students, Wednesday Kids Club will start back up soon. Youth have a dinner with SAGES to look forward to. Davidson College students, we have a lot planned to welcome you to campus: a lunch right after worship today, plus UKirk campus ministry and the Adopt-A-Student program. The Chancel and Geneva choirs resume rehearsal. Rally Day is a few weeks away, when we will celebrate the start of a new year of Christian Education. You have been collecting food all summer for the Blythe Backpack program. Reusable grocery bags are for sale because we want to care for God's world and reduce our use of plastic. We have raised money for our mission partners in Nicaragua while holding them in our prayers. There is a great deal going on in the life

and ministry of this congregation, and all these events – all of these ministries – are rooted in what happens here on Sunday mornings.

Worship is directly related to the rest of our lives. Here in worship, we experience the rhythm of God's grace, and we respond in gratitude. Out of our gratitude, we go into God's world, serving and leading. Our service brings us back again to worship. We move from worship to ministry and from ministry to worship, in an ongoing pattern.<sup>10</sup>

The same pattern is seen in Ephesians: from worship to daily life and back to worship. The Ephesians writer gives moral instructions not to individuals, but to a community – instructions to a Christian community on how to live a life that has been transformed because of Jesus Christ. This is a community that sings hymns in praise of God – a community that lifts their voices in psalms and spirituals. The church is charged not to settle for cheap thrills. "Do not get drunk with wine," they are told. Becoming drunk is a cheap imitation of Spirit-filled worship.

Ephesians has a good many instructions for the daily lives of the community. Do not live as unwise people, but as wise. Redeem your time. Do not be foolish, but understand the will of the Lord. Give thanks to God at all times and for everything.<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere in Ephesians, more instructions for daily life are given. Be angry, but do not sin.<sup>12</sup> Thieves must give up stealing and turn to honest labor.<sup>13</sup> Be subject to one another.<sup>14</sup> Put away anger and wrath and be kind to one another, tenderhearted and forgiving.<sup>15</sup> Ephesians offers moral instructions for Christian life, and these instructions come from words of worship and return to worship. The community worships, they go out and live Christ-centered lives, and they return to worship.

Worship is the human response to the divine. Worship is giving honor to the One who is greater than we are. *Worship is the most important thing we do.* In worship, the Holy Spirit calls people together to respond to the God revealed in Scripture and in Jesus Christ. In worship, we ascribe praise to God; we proclaim God's greatness for who God is. *Worship is the most important thing we do.* In worship, we declare our allegiance to God. We worship out of gratitude – for all that God has given us, for all that God has done for us. In worship we "make a joyful noise to the Lord with gladness," and "come into God's presence with singing" (Ps. 100:1-2).<sup>16</sup> *Worship is the most important thing we do.*

The language of worship runs throughout the book of Ephesians. The writer frequently cites scripture. The letter references the Psalms<sup>17</sup>; Paul's first letter to the Corinthians and James<sup>18</sup>; Genesis<sup>19</sup>; Exodus and Deuteronomy.<sup>20</sup> The original audience may have been primarily Gentile, but if these Ephesians are to be Christians, they need exposure to the depth of scripture.<sup>21</sup>

The writer of Ephesians referenced Hebrew Scripture, and his writings eventually became our scripture, canonized and included in the New Testament. In fact, we frequently use words from Ephesians in our communal liturgy. When we celebrate a baptism in the life of this church, we say these words: "There is one body and one Spirit...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all..." (Eph. 4:4-6).<sup>22</sup> After we confess our sin, we are reminded of God's forgiving grace; we may use this liturgy from Ephesians: "By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8).<sup>23</sup> At the end of the service, you may receive this charge from Ephesians: "Live a life worthy of your calling, giving glory to God in all things" (Eph. 4:1).<sup>24</sup>

The importance of worship runs throughout the entire book of Ephesians. For it is here in worship where we come to experience God's presence. In worship, we praise God, we give thanks for all God has done in Christ, and we call on the Holy Spirit to guide us; in worship, we open our hearts and

minds to the possibility of transformation – to be remade into the likeness of Christ. *Worship is the most important thing we do.*

We can do good works: feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, care for the sick. That is an incomplete picture. Without worship, we are a humanitarian group with warm hearts. Grounded in worship, however, we are participating in the work God is already doing in the world. *Worship is the most important thing we do.*

We can study scripture and theology. We can learn all about the world through biology, psychology, and calculus. That is an incomplete picture. Without worship, we are scholars. Grounded in worship, we are the Body of Christ, striving to know God's creation. *Worship is the most important thing we do.*

We can have youth and young adult groups, UKirk, men's groups, and Presbyterian Women circles. That is an incomplete picture. Without worship, we are a social club – a country club with low membership fees.<sup>25</sup> Grounded in worship, we are the Church, gathered in fellowship and community. *Worship is the most important thing we do.*

We can sing and play instruments, write songs and study sacred music. That is an incomplete picture. Without worship, we are masters of our craft, or perhaps amateur admirers of melody and composition. Grounded in worship, we are a Spirit-filled community, singing praise and thanksgiving to our generous God. *Worship is the most important thing we do.*

We can fill backpacks with school supplies and volunteer at Blythe Elementary school. We can be Bonner scholars and log our volunteer hours. That is an incomplete picture. Without worship, we are trying to be good human beings. Grounded in worship, we are the Church, striving to make this world more in line with God's Kingdom. *Worship is the most important thing we do.*

We can follow all the advice in Ephesians, but without worship, we miss the point. *Worship is the most important thing we do.* Siblings in Christ, let us continue our worship of God.

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- <sup>1</sup> *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Third Edition, Michael D. Coogan, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 320-321.
- <sup>2</sup> Martin, Ralph P., *Interpretation: Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 1-10.
- <sup>3</sup> *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 320-321.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup> *The Companion to the Book of Common Worship*, Peter C. Bowers, ed. (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2003), 1.
- <sup>6</sup> McKim, Donald K. *Presbyterian Questions, Presbyterian Answers: Exploring Christian Faith* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2003), 71.
- <sup>7</sup> *The Companion to the Book of Common Worship*, 30.
- <sup>8</sup> Eph. 1:1
- <sup>9</sup> Eph. 6:23
- <sup>10</sup> McKim, 78.
- <sup>11</sup> Eph. 5:15-17, 20
- <sup>12</sup> Eph. 4:26
- <sup>13</sup> Eph. 4:28
- <sup>14</sup> Eph. 5:21
- <sup>15</sup> Eph. 4:31-32
- <sup>16</sup> McKim, 71.
- <sup>17</sup> Eph. 4:8
- <sup>18</sup> Eph. 4:26
- <sup>19</sup> Eph. 5:31
- <sup>20</sup> Eph. 6:2
- <sup>21</sup> Clark-Soles, Jamie, "Exegetical Perspective" in *Feasting on the Word*, Year B Vol. 3, eds. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Taylor Brown (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 350-355.
- <sup>22</sup> *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 407.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 462.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 155.
- <sup>25</sup> Sage wisdom from David Brinson, paraphrase by me