

Sermon: *Worshiping Together*
Text: *Revelation 5:11 - 14*
Date: *November 14, 2010*
Place: *Jesup First UMC*

God created you! God loves you! And God has a plan for your life! And the only thing, He wants from you is: love! Jesus said: *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.”* Nothing is more important than this; we were created to love God. That’s what the Bible calls worship and worship is not a ritual, it’s not a routine, it’s an expression of our love to God.

Revelation 5 describes a great worship service: *“Then, I looked again and I heard the singing of thousands and millions of angels around the throne and the living beings and the elders. And they sang in a mighty chorus: ‘The Lamb is worthy, the Lamb who was slain. He is worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing.’ And then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea. They also sang, ‘Blessing and honor and glory and power belong to the One sitting on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever.”*

Now, that’s worship! But you know, it’s hard for some people to that; some people have a hard time saying, *“I love you.”* So, I want us to reflect on six ways that you and I can express our love to God.

First, we express our love to God by singing to Him! Psalm 147 says: *“Sing out your thanks to Him. Sing praises to our God.”* Notice, the Psalmist didn’t ask us to sing well; he just said sing. Sing from the

heart, express your emotions to God. Psalm 66 says: **“Let the whole world bless our God and sing aloud His praises.”** And Psalm 95 says: **“Come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us give a joyful shout to the rock of our salvation.”**

Every Worship Service needs singing. Now, music is an interesting thing. Music is very cultural oriented and culture is always changing. Music has changed so much during the last 40 years. And so, many churches find themselves with a dilemma when it comes to music. How are we supposed to make sense of the constant change being presented to us? Well, this is the principle that I was taught: It doesn't matter if it's old hymn or a new chorus. It doesn't matter if it was written 400 years ago or 4 months ago. As long as the song glorifies God, it is a valid way of expressing our love to Him. And as long as we sing from the heart, God is pleased with our worship. Singing is an express of love to God!

Second, we express our love for God by talking to Him! The Psalmist said: **“I love the Lord because He hears me and answers my prayer, because He bends down and listens. I will pray as long as I have breath.”** Prayer is an important part of public and private worship. And it's a two way conversation, a way of expressing our needs, our wants, and our feelings to God. And when we do that together, when we pray with one another (especially in worship), God hears and answers. Jesus said: **“If any two of you agree together as touching anything, it shall be done for you.”** Prayer is an expression of our love to God.

Third, we express our love to God by listening to Him! Now, that's the other side of prayer. Prayer is talking to Him and prayer is listening to Him too. Friends, God still speaks ... if only we could set aside our busy schedules and get away from the noise of our lives long enough, we just might be able to hear Him.

He speaks to us through His Word! Do you read it? *He speaks to us through our experiences!* Do you stop and reflect on them? *He speaks to us through life's trials!* Do you ever stop and ask why? *He speaks to us through other believers!* But do we really listen? Proverbs 11 says: **"Without good direction, people lose their way; the more wise counsel you follow the better your changes."** *God speaks to us through our impressions.* He guides us by placing thoughts and ideas in our minds. Now, we have to be careful because Satan is a deceiver and he will come as an angel of light. So, we must test our thoughts and our motives to make sure God is really speaking to us.

But Jesus said: **"I am the Good Shepherd and I know my own sheep and they know me and they listen to my voice."** Listening is an expression of love to God.

Fourth, we express our love to God by publicly identifying with Him. Jesus warned His disciples about the dangers of being ashamed of Him; Jesus said: **"If anyone is ashamed of me and my teachings then I will be ashamed of Him when I come in the glory of my Father."** And so, Paul told the church at Rome: **"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ."**

Now, there are several ways that we identify with Christ in worship. *First, the Affirmation of Faith!* When we affirm our faith, we declare the sacred truths of Christianity. We establish in our own hearts and minds what we believe and then, we proclaim it to one another. Now, our Methodist tradition gives us several Affirmations. Some are simple and some are more complex. The very first affirmation of the church was very simple; when they said: “*Jesus is Lord,*” they affirmed their faith and publicly identified with Jesus.

Second, Baptism! Romans 6 says: “*When we went under the water we left the old country of sin behind and when we came up out of the water we entered into the new country of grace, a new life in a new land.*” Now, baptism is a sacrament, an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. And when we come to the waters of baptism, we are making a public statement of our faith in the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul said: “*Going under the water was a burial of your old life. Coming up out of it was a resurrection, God raising you from the dead as He did in Christ.*” Galatians 3 says: “*Your baptism in Christ was not just washing you up for a fresh start. It also involved dressing you in an adult faith wardrobe, Christ’s life, the fulfillment of God’s original promise.*” In baptism, we publicly identify with Jesus.

A third way of publicly identifying with Jesus is Holy Communion! Holy Communion is the sacrament that remembers Jesus’ suffering on the cross on our behalf. The pastor repeats Jesus’ words: “*This is my body given for you*” and “*This is my blood given for you.*”

And we take the bread and the cup as a way of saying, *“This is what happened to Jesus because of my sin.”*

In worship, we identify with Jesus by affirming our faith, by entering the waters of baptism, and by celebrating Holy Communion.

Fifth, we express our love to God by committing to Him! Joshua stood before the people of Israel and said: ***“Choose you this day whom you will serve.”*** And the people responded: ***“We are determined to serve the Lord.”*** And the Bible tells us: ***“So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day at Shechem, committing them to a permanent and binding contract with the Lord.”*** You see, love demands commitment. You really don’t love someone unless you’re committed to them.

And so, every worship experience gives us an opportunity to recommit ourselves to God, to deepen our faithfulness to God through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness, to grow, to serve, to fellowship, to worship, and to reach out to those around us in the name of Jesus Christ.

Paul told the church at Rome: ***“I urge you, therefore brothers and sisters, to present your bodies to God as a holy and living sacrifice.”*** That’s commitment. And commitment is one way we express our love to God.

Sixth, we express our love for God by giving to Him! One of the distinguishing characteristics of the early Christians was their generosity. Acts 4 says: ***“All the believers were of one heart and mind, and they felt that what they owned was not their own; they shared***

everything they had. And the Apostles gave powerful witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God's great favor was upon them all. There was no poverty among them, because people who owned land or houses sold them and brought the money to the Apostles to give to others in need.

Can you imagine a church like that? Where nobody has an un-met need! That's what happens when you give. The first offering that was received didn't pay the pastor's salary; it didn't pay the electric bill or the water bill; the first offering took care of the orphans and the widows. It fed the hungry and clothed the naked. Giving what an expression of love. In fact, the best way to spell love is G-I-V-E! "*For God so loved the world that He gave.*" And the best way to test the sincerity of your love is by how much you give. Paul told the church at Corinthians: "*Just as you excel in faith, in speech, in knowledge and in complete earnestness, see that you also excel in the grace of giving. I am not commanding you but I want to test the sincerity of your love.*" Giving is one way we express our love to God!

Brothers and sisters, the most controversial thing happening in the church today is worship. And it doesn't need to be. You see, worship is simply expressing our love for God to God. Now, we all do that differently. Some like traditional music and traditional forms; some like contemporary music and contemporary forms, but we worship better when we worship together. When what you and I want is set aside for what give Him praise and glory.