



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### **The Church God had in Mind: Going Deep in Worship**

**by Rev. Matt Hook**

**1 Peter 1:14-16**

*“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”*

Two summers ago my family and I were blessed to get to Florida. In spite of a trip to Disneyworld and Great-Grandma Hook’s 95<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration in Tallahassee, we planned go to the beach on our last night. We didn’t know which beach or even which coast to go to on our trip from Tallahassee back to Orlando, so we asked our family who lives there. Of course because they live there, they hardly ever go to the beach, so they each had different opinions. (There’s a sermon in there as well). My Uncle Tom, who lives in Florida, is a fisherman and contractor/builder. He is a man of few words. When we were talking about what beach to go to, he said, “I like the Atlantic better than the Gulf. At the Atlantic you look out and you’re lookin’ at water 2000 feet deep. The Gulf’s no more than a couple hundred.” The thrill of the depth and mystery and power and challenge of that was written all over his face. Well, *we chose the Atlantic-side beach.*

It was early evening, and we got to see the Atlantic’s beautiful, majestic, rolling waves. The littler cousins were playing in a large tide pool that had been created by the retreating waters. In it were trapped some little fish and those shells that disappear into the sand. The kids splashed and laughed and chased the fish. Once they learned to keep their mouths tightly shut in the salt water, they were happy and for a long time were totally absorbed in the warm friendly water, which probably got to about 2 feet deep in some places. It must have seemed deep to them. But, behind the rocks that caused the tide pool was the vast Atlantic Ocean, 2000 feet deep, right before our eyes. And it *was* amazing. You know, I spend so much time defending the Great Lakes, trying to get people to understand their immensity that I tell them it’s like the ocean. Well, I realize I’d better spend a little more time at the ocean before I make that claim. (I’d still choose the Lakes, though.) And I’d still keep my kids in the tide pool instead of the ocean, at least at this age.

What I was watching was a parable. Like my kids and their cousins, many of us worship a God of the tide pool, never quite realizing that just beyond us is the beginning of the deep, powerful, ocean of God’s love. Many of us never quite hear the rhythmic invitation of the ocean to come, to explore, to dive in to the depths of faith.

The Christian faith is like an ocean: beautiful and immense, beckoning, powerful, and mysterious. This summer we are looking at what is vital for us as a church to dive in more deeply to the ocean of God’s love. It is for those of us who must now leave the tide pool and venture by faith into the deep waters of God’s call upon our lives. And today we’re talking about worship. Worshipping with a body of believers is like turning your back on the tide pool and facing the Atlantic. There is a rhythm to worship, which leads to a call and a craving as we celebrate God’s presence.

For us to be an equipping center for the unchurched 1000s, for us go and make disciples, to be the church God had in mind, we respond in celebration worship.

Peter understood this. He called a small and struggling church to be holy. He writes:

**Be like obedient children.** Worship is a reunion. and a rehearsal. Your presence says something positive to other Christians. It's important, so we can minister to one another. Bobby Manuel, was a blues guitarist on Beale Street in Memphis. He played in the Sunday morning contemporary service. If anybody had a reason to stay home, it was him. But after literally 10 cups of coffee, he would make it every Sunday morning. We need more Bobby Manuels. Whenever one of God's children deliberately absents himself or herself from worship, that believer is saying to the rest of the family, "It's really not important to come to the Father's house to worship. The family can get along without us."

**Do not be conformed to the former lusts:** worship is a reminder that we have put God in his rightful place, *in* place of all our other gods. Worshiping together reminds us that God is god and we are not.

**Like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves:** worship is a response and a rebirth. In worship, we respond to God's call: like the rhythm of the ocean. The Holy One doesn't *need* us, but God *calls* us and *seeks* our worship. He seeks it for our own good. Be holy, because I am holy. Holiness here means freedom from moral evil, set apart for God's service. Holiness originates in God's nature.

Why are we to be holy? Because the God we worship is holy.

Why are we to be pure? Because the God we worship is pure.

Why are we to be just? Because the God we worship is just.

Why are we to be loving? Because the God we worship is loving.

Why do we serve others? Because the God we worship showed us the ultimate service

– dying in our place.

Last week, Steve took us through the elements of private worship, daily quiet time with God. Today we are looking at worship. Now remember, we don't go to church to worship. We go to church to worship publicly and corporately. Nothing happening right now is more important than us lifting up the Lord in worship today. I feel sorry for those folks jogging or sleeping in, or eating at the Lighthouse right now, because they're missing worship: our window into the bigger picture. Worship is a way of life. It is the difference between walking in the ocean and swimming. True worship is about really living. It's *not* about running the rat race at an ever-increasing pace or owning a bigger house or more expensive car; wearing designer clothes or retiring early. Life is found in Jesus Christ: living God's purpose, serving people, and keeping my promises. True worship is God's Spirit touches my spirit.

**Why do we struggle?! Because we don't understand ourselves, we don't understand worship, and we don't understand God. (And they *are* connected!)**

1. **We struggle because we don't understand ourselves.** *We were designed to worship.* Everyone in the world worships: no matter how much money you have, how much brains you have, how many opportunities you have, or *don't* have. The problem is, some of us have some really bad gods. And the Lord God wants to deliver us from that.

### **Psalm 115:1-8**

*Not to us, O LORD, not to us, But to Your name give glory*

*Because of Your loving kindness, because of Your truth.*

*Why should the nations say, "Where, now, is their God?"*

*But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.*

*Their idols are silver and gold, the work of man's hands.*

*They have mouths, but they cannot speak; they have eyes, but they cannot see;*

*They have ears, but they cannot hear; they have noses, but they cannot smell;*

*They have hands, but they cannot feel; they have feet, but they cannot walk;*

*They cannot make a sound with their throat.*

*Those who make them will become like them, everyone who trusts in them.*

Sometimes we're in danger of thinking idols are only little god calves with orgies and dancing around them, but an idol is simply a really bad god: a substitute for God or a supplement to God. And along with all the other stuff in our lives that we worship, it includes ourselves. But listen to what the Psalm writer reveals about our substitutes for God:

- **They have mouths but do not speak. No promises.**
  - Since recorded history God has spoken his promises through his leaders, prophets, and his Son. Imagine living your without God's promises to rely on! (But we do).
- **They have eyes, but they do not see. No protection.**
  - "I will guide you with my eye (Ps 32:8). The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous. (Ps 34:15) Imagine being outside of God's view. (But we act like he's far away).
- **They have ears but do not hear. No prayer.**
  - God hears us when we pray. He encourages us to come to him and pour out our hearts before him. Imagine not being able to go to God whenever you needed him? (But we forget to pray, don't we?)
- **They have noses, but do not smell. No praise.**
  - The aroma (Gen 8:21) of worship was always in the temple. Not just incense, like we picture in Orthodox and Catholic services, but BBQ! Imagine the Temple during times of sacrifice and offerings. Noah gave burnt offerings when he finally put his feet on dry land. Imagine offering your best to a dead idol and knowing that your best was never recognized or received? (But when was the last time we offered God our best, rather than the leftovers of our lives?)
- **They have hands, but they do not handle. No power.**
  - The prophet Jeremiah said "Do not be afraid of those gods. They can't do evil, nor can they do any good." (Jer. 10:5). "Are there any among the idols that can cause rain?" (Jer. 14:22). Elijah made fun of Baal. "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he's meditating, or busy, or relieving himself, or sleeping." (1 Kings 18:27). Imagine giving you power to a powerless god? (But we're addicted, aren't we?)
- **They have feet, but they don't walk. No presence.**
  - Isaiah contrasts Jehovah who carried Israel with the idols Bel and Nebo who had to be carried by their worshipers (Isa. 46:1-7). One of the names of Jesus is "Immanuel – God with us" (Matt. 1:2-3). Imagine with Bette Midler God watching "from a distance," as though the Living God were aloof and far off? (But we treat him like he's irrelevant in our lives, don't we?)
- **Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them. No progress.**
  - Idolatry is serving the creature rather than the Creator. (Rom 1:25). Only the Creator can transform us to be like himself. Spiritually speaking, those who worship and trust in false gods eventually become blind, deaf, dumb, weak, and immobile. We can never rise above our present circumstance, because we manufacture it ourselves.

2. **We struggle because we don't understand worship.** Did you catch that last line in the Psalm? *We become like those things we worship.* Worship is literally "dedication pledged to God; and the ways which those are expressed. Our word worship is from the Old English meaning "worth-ship," the worthiness of the object. Our lives should include praise and worship of the living God.

What does *that* mean: "We should praise the Lord?" It sounds so "churchy." If you've read the Psalms and other parts of the Bible, it sounds like God *demand*s praise from his people. How can *that* be right? I can't stand people who are always fishing for complements. *We all despise* those people who demand assurance of how good they are, or how smart they are, or how successful they are. How much worse are the crowds around every dictator, every millionaire, every celebrity, who *fill* that demand? Why would the Psalmist continually say "Praise the Lord...O praise the Lord with me...Praise Him." The Psalmist even tells the whales, the snowstorms, and all kinds of other things what they ought to do, whether they listened or not! Psalm 50:23 says "He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors me," as if we could bargain with God, like the pagans think. Quantity of praise even seems to matter (Psalm 119:164). It seems to get down to bargaining in several Psalms. "If I praise him, I'll be saved" (Psalm 30:10, 88:10, 119:175). How can that be a part of worship and praising?

It helped me to read some words by C.S. Lewis on the trouble he had with praising according to the Psalms. He said to understand it, "it is easiest to begin with inanimate objects... What do we mean when we say that a picture is 'admirable?' ...The sense in which the picture 'deserves' or 'demands' admiration is rather this; that admiration is the correct, adequate or appropriate, response to it. If paid, admiration will not be 'thrown away,' and if we do not admire it, *we* shall be stupid, insensible, and great losers, we shall have missed something....It is in the process of being worshiped that God communicates His presence to people." Lewis goes on to say "I have noticed how the humblest [people], and at the same time most balanced and capacious minds, *praised the most*, while the cranks, misfits and malcontents praised the least (whether it was books, artwork, or cooking). Except in rare cases, **praise always seems to be inner health made audible**....I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but *completes* the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation...." (Reflections on the Psalms by C. S. Lewis). Wow. Praise is inner health made audible. ). The Scotch catechism says that our "chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." That is why we were created. Even in the midst of tragedy and difficulties (or perhaps especially during these times) we are to praise God.

3. **We struggle because we don't understand God.** *Only God deserves our ultimate worship.* All other gods warp us. Only God made a covenant to be with us. Only God is eternal. Only God is deeper than the ocean and higher than the storm. Only God sent his Son Jesus Christ to die in my place. Only God is holy. Only God is just. Only God is faithful. Only God is pure. Only God is our Creator. Only God is true. Only God is the source of life. Only God can free us from our selves. Only God sent his only Son to die on the cross that we might live eternally. Only God. Only God. Only God. Who are we to worship? Only God.