

Praise the Lord!
Psalm 148

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I want to speak briefly today about the act and actions of worship before we begin to sing.

To be sure, I hope you come to church in the expectation that you will find something that nourishes your faith life. I flatter myself that it is occasionally the sermon, but I am fully aware that not every sermon connects with every member every Sunday.

Sometimes it may be the scriptures. The 23rd Psalm doesn't need exposition to move me and to remind of the deep promises of faith that I have relied upon in times in sorrow and challenge. Sometimes, perhaps, it is the hymn – a friend recently confessed to me that he can't sing *Amazing Grace* without being brought to tears. On Easter Sunday, I sat in nearly dumbfounded silence when Megan and Mark finished their voice/trumpet duet only to gob-smacked by the whole choir when they sang the Brahms. Sometimes, perhaps it is the words of the prayers that shoot like an arrow straight into our hearts.

I hope you come here expecting to be moved.

I remember a number of years back when my cousin, herself a life-long church-goer, was speaking about what it took to get her out of bed on Sunday in order to go to church. I quote, "If I am going to get out of bed, put on my makeup and my best pant-suit, I need to know I'm going to hear something inspirational."

But did you know the fundamental act of worship is not the act of coming to find inspiration?

The word we use to describe what we do here on Sundays at eleven derives from an old English word and what it means is to ascribe worth.

We are coming here primarily to say something about God!

And specifically we are coming to say something about the worth of God.

Perhaps that is the reason that psalm 148 is so unabashedly praise-oriented... that the people of Israel needed the words to say that God isn't just like us only bigger and better, but is fundamentally, completely worthy of our adoration.

When congregations sing, we are essentially praying – we are praying songs of adoration, which is praise, or we are praying songs of supplication, asking God's grace in our lives or the lives of others.

The hymns are not sung just because we like the tunes, though I do like a lot of them, and I know you do too, the hymns are not sung just because the words speak to us, though they certainly do.

The hymns are sung because they are addressed to God.

Which, incidentally, is worth considering if you are one of our members who stands there stone-faced holding a hymnal while the congregation sings around you. I'm not judging, I'm just saying that if your audience is the Lord of the Universe who created everything out of nothing, I'm not sure not singing is a gamble I'd risk, but hey, it's your choice. I suppose you could use the time to pray, which, in the unlikely event that I'm wrong and our God is, in fact, a vengeful God, would probably be a very good use of your time.

When we sing, we praise God. When we sing, we say something about God. When we sing, we are engaged in the act of worship. And God delights in our praise!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.