

The Stewardship and Generosity Corner

The goal of Zion's Stewardship and Generosity Committee is to help God's people grow in their relationship with Jesus using the time, talents, and finances God has entrusted to them.

This month's article will focus on another of Zion's Seven Marks of Discipleship – Worship. Zion's Vision Statement for "Worship" is - *We envision a congregation that worships enthusiastically and is so hungry to praise and worship God that at least half of its baptized members are present for worship on a weekly basis.*

Worship is defined as reverence, homage or honor paid to God – ceremonies or services expressing such reverence, public worship.

Worshiping God can take place anywhere, but this article will focus on liturgical worship and private worship. Liturgical worship is what takes place at Zion every Sunday. We follow a liturgical setting with prayers and readings, a sermon, Holy Communion, and the singing of hymns.

For many years in my adulthood, I occasionally attended worship, and even though I was at worship, I can truthfully say I wasn't worshipping. I was thinking about anything and everything. Listening to the sermon, or trying to listen, my mind wandered. I got out of worship as much as I put into it – chiefly nothing. Many times, I wondered why I even took the time to attend; so little did it mean to me.

Then in 1995, I had a life-altering medical diagnosis. I was seriously ill. So ill I was told I would likely die within two years. It was exactly at that moment in time when hearing the news, that God suddenly became real for me. I could feel his love and caring raining down on me and filling me up. I felt peace. I felt contentment. I wasn't afraid. It was then, that I started to think about worshipping God – something I knew I had not been doing. I wanted and needed God in my life just like I needed food and water. I don't think I ever knew who God was before.

As soon as I possibly could after surgery, I had my husband bring me to worship at Zion. Everything about worship felt different, but it wasn't different – I was different! It was now something I wanted to do not something I felt I should do. I started to truly listen especially to the sermons. I started to participate. My heart was open to the experience, and my faith, that tiny little mustard seed planted years before at my Baptism, started to slowly grow. There are still times when I struggle to focus during worship. I find my mind wandering. I think we all do at one time or another. The wonderful thing is God understands – after all, he made us.

Private worship is informal and often takes place at home. For me, private worship is something I always do when I walk. I call this form of worship praying. It's me having a conversation with God. I think and ponder, I talk and ask, I listen, and most times God is ready and willing to answer, especially when I call on his Holy Spirit. Don't roll your eyes, but yes, he speaks to me, just not with a thunderous voice that speaks loudly and deeply as in the Bible. It's more like a drop of knowledge which comes to me, something I wouldn't have thought of myself. I like to think God speaks to everyone, but it probably doesn't look the same for everybody.

Over the years, I've had occasion to struggle. There have been some really tough times in my life. There have been a few more health scares and surgeries. I've had difficulties with my dad and his wife, and unfortunately one of my beloved sisters. I've been hurt by unkind remarks made by people in my own family and even my church family. I've prayed and worshiped asking to forgive and to be forgiven for what I've done to others. With God's help forgiveness has come, but I still struggle with the hurt. I wish I could forget but I can't seem to. I assume there is a lesson to be learned and I continue to pray to uncover it, to put it in the past, to truly relax and forgive. I know eventually God will send his Holy Spirit with another thought or idea to fix this problem. He's done it in the past and it is truly a beautiful thing.

Here's what I discovered way back in 1995. To truly connect and worship God bring your real self, warts and all, not some version of who people feel you are or who you might want to be. Reach out to God in worship and prayers - he is everywhere you are. God wants to be close to all of us.

Worship is the purest expression of appreciation to God for the breath in our lungs. God lives to hear us worship.

In God's peace, grace, and love,

Karen Sylvester

