

You Alone
April 29, 2013
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So, it's kind of weird, ya know?

...Living in a culture that's so dead-set, these days,

on speaking out against worshippers involved in organized religion,

We have a lot of really fervent worship still happening between our borders, right?

The list goes on and on...but what are some of the things

people tend to worship in our culture?

First one that pops to mind for me, are those pocket-sized rectangles.

That thin, green paper, right?

Money, of course. We worship money,

and often those people who've managed to grab a lot of it.

(Nothing new. That one's been worshipped for *thousands* of years.

...The supposedly "almighty dollar" for hundreds.)

What's another thing we tend to worship in *modern* American culture?

Next thing that pops into my head:

The staaaarrs... right?

Oh man. It's so bad.

The other day I was scanning through Netflix with Ky,

and I saw a Brad Pitt movie that was probably pretty good;

But I just couldn't stand the thought of watching it.

Not because I don't like his work, or the types of roles he tends to choose

(I actually used to be a fan of his stuff);

But because I was just so tired of seeing his face.

BRANGELINA.

MAN. Thought they were gone from the spotlight, only to find them pop right back up on the racks last week, just next to Kim Kardashian's latest weight gain!

I skipped past the movie, because I just couldn't handle the idea

of giving the guy *any* more attention than he already gathers.

Too much!

(I'll probably go see World War Z, though.

That one looks good enough to maybe override the Brangelina problem.)

...What else?

The list goes on. ... Keeps getting longer and longer, it seems, as the years pile on.

Anything, right? Touch screen technology is definitely a new runner-up, these days.

People are even getting fanatical about it.

Starting to put apple stickers on their rear windshields...

There's even a strange evangelism going on, with Apple products. Ever notice that?

We've got a friend who actually got the Apple insignia tattooed on his body!

(And it wasn't even small! This big! [show size])

I won't keep going with the list of things and people our culture worships,
because we just don't have enough time,
But I'm sure a lot of other examples come to mind for you, too.

All of this I'm mentioning right now,
not because I got some kind of bee in my bonnet
while staring at the tabloids in the grocery line---
---But because our lectionary---our guided meditation---for today,
asks us to wonder what it is, in our lives, that is truly *worthy* of our worship.

The morning's theme asks us to take a moment, and really think about this---
---really beg the question of our hearts.
...And our scriptures touch on this idea of worship, too.

What is it? What drives us to worship, and how does this worship happen for us,
When that feeling comes?

Now, I'm not going to go the traditional route of reading
the Webster's definition of worship.

Of course, it's in sync with what we already know.

Mentions reverence, honor, adoration.

(All of that more simple definition easily applied
to all of those things and people we just talked about).

...But going further than all of that,

What happens inside of us, when we truly worship?

Past the definition, and into that very real and vital feeling we experience in our souls?

It starts with a sense of being overwhelmed, right?

Just *overtaken* first from the outside, in,

Causing a reaction of joy and awe to sort of spring up from the center of ourselves....

Then all of that overwhelming sensation moves from that place deep inside,

Back out into the world, right?

Through whatever way we can find to express our passion—

--to express our joy at experiencing the source of our worship.

Sometimes it's through words. Conversation.

Sometimes it's through song---

---singing or playing music that reminds us of this thing we love.

Sometimes it's through art---a visual display.

Things we put up around us. Symbols--images--

that remind us of that thing that makes this reverence pour from our hearts.

Sometimes it's through displays of respect.

And worship even happens through our allegiance, right?

---By following after that thing that causes us to worship,

and seeking more of it in our lives,

And identifying our own life's tie and connection

to that one thing that inspires awe in our head and our chest.

Our scripture readings give examples of what it means to worship,
and we'll get into that in a second...

.... But first, let's go back to that question of what it is
that is actually worthy of this kind of uprising in our soul,
And the respect, and love, and honor we show as a result of feeling it.
Is it the power of money? Is it actors? iPads?

Apple? The Beatles? Physical fitness?

Is it science? Or even something as beautiful and glorious as nature itself?

No, I don't think so.

See all of these things might inspire.

All of these things might fill us with joy at experiencing...

... but are they each of any of them, alone, worthy of *worship*?

To me, it seems weird and just... *misplaced*...

...to worship any of these things, on their own.

In my *personal* take on this... and I know you have your own... but in *my* mind...

It's like being in love with someone, and, as a result,

focusing your whole mind and your whole heart and the sharpest attention of your eyes,

On a single hair on their forearm.

...Dedicating yourself fully to that one strand.

...It's like being captured by a painting,

And intently staring into a single brush stroke on the canvas...

...Does that make any sense?

Here's how it makes sense to me...

See, in my opinion, there's only One Thing, worthy of our worship.

And that is the whole of All Things...

...the One whole and Holy force of Life we call "God."

God being the fullness of All things,

anything we see or touch, or can even imagine in a universe of infinite possibility...

...Not one single *piece* of that fullness of existence

can ever encapsulate the glory of the Whole.

And when we feel inspired or overjoyed by any single thing we see in this life,

What we're doing, is we're brushing up against---catching the slightest scent---

---*sensing* just a *touch*---

Of the power, and fullness, and majesty, of the overwhelming force of Life.

... The jaw-dropping beauty of the very Life

thriving and moving through us, and all around us.

Which we're a part of, and cannot exist apart from.

And to worship any single piece of that thing, it's just...

...a mistaken glance. ...A distraction.

Each thing that brings awe to our souls,
 should be the cause of us looking up from where we are, and praising the Whole...
 ...praising Life, Itself.
 ...Praising God.

When we feel inspired, we're being moved by God. By Greater Life.
 Not just that one tiny object, or thing, or person, reflecting just a glimpse of that glory.
 So I believe our worship is more rightly placed on the actual Source. The Whole.

And how does this happen?

How do we worship God in these moments we feel overwhelmed and overtaken?

Going back to what we were talking about earlier,
 with our scriptures, being an example:

The psalmist shows this praise—this worship---so clearly...

We didn't read this one at the start of the service,

but I like it, and think it works well with what we're talking about.

From Psalm 42, he says:

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God? 3 My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, "Where is your God?" 4 These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival. ...Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help 6 and my God. 8 By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.

That's one example of the kind of worship that comes from our soul

at the sight and experience of God.

Letting ourselves feel that draw, that yearning to be closer.

Placing the joy of our hope, where it belongs.

In our gospel reading, Jesus also talks about what it means to truly worship.

From John, CH 13:

Verse 31: When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32 If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.

Verse 34: I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Here we see the definition of worship branching out a little bit

into what we talked about last week.

Jesus is saying that in glorifying Christ, we're actually glorifying God,
who dwells in Jesus' life...

... then goes on to say that when we show our love for each other,
we're showing our love for God.

Our worship of God is an experience of taking in, and letting out.

Being overwhelmed inside by the things we see around us,
and spilling that joy out from within, far and wide.

---Knowing each piece of life around us, as fragments of the All,
And lifting up our praise to God as a sign of understanding
the beauty and holiness of the Whole.

So our soul might cry out like the Psalmist's, when he said in Psalm 148:

(Psalm 148) Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights! 2 Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host! 3 Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars! 4 Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! 5 Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created. 6 He established them forever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed. 7 Praise the LORD from the earth, [you sea monsters] and all deeps, 8 fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command! 9 Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! 10 Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds! 11 Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! 12 Young men and women alike, old and young together! 13 Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven. 14 He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to him. Praise the LORD!

As we go about day to day, seeing all of these things---

---these strands of The Larger being worshipped,

Let's remember to lift our eyes higher than any of these smaller things.

Let's open our hearts to let out the joy of the Greater Life

that gives movement to *all* things.

Let's worship the One deserving of everything inside of us...

...Let's worship the holy beauty of God.

Amen.