

Why Worship with the Church?

We have been through a time in which we have been unable to gather together weekly for worship as the local Body of Christ. It has been challenging, to say the least, for us not to be together in these weeks.

Some may think that it isn't important for the Church to be together regularly to worship. I've seen comments on social media that indicate that it doesn't matter. "You don't need to go to a building to worship!" they say. What matters, they say, is that Christians worship at home, and do acts of service and kindness to others. One prominent commenter has even said that "Wouldn't it be great if the churches were the last places to re-open?"

This shows a fundamental misunderstanding of what the Church is to be about. The greatest commandment (a summary of the first four of the Ten Commandments) is "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind," (Matthew 22:27, which was Jesus repeating Deuteronomy 6:5). In this context, that means worship God with no other gods taking His place, with no graven images, no misusing God's name, and honoring God on a regular, weekly basis. These essentials of worshipping the One True God have never been abrogated.

While we may set aside regular corporate worship for a time, it is never the case that God's people should abandon it for good. There have been times of plague and pestilence and war before this. On occasion churches would not gather for worship. Yet they made it a priority to restore regular worship as soon as would be possible. We should, too.

Corporate worship is the place where all the rest of our Christian experience begins. Whether hearing the Word together, learning together, serving together, being engaged in ministry together—they all start with worshipping together with the Church.

In his book, *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church*, Don Whitney gives the following reasons for the priority of corporate worship:

1. God reveals Himself more clearly in congregational worship than in nature. When the Word of God (His direct, personal revelation) is preached, God speaks to us in a clearer manner of the plan and means of salvation, the glory of Christ, our home in Heaven, and our relationships with other believers than through the general revelation of nature—which speaks to none of these things.

2. God is glorified more in congregational worship than in private worship. We *are* to worship (have devotions, if you will) privately. Yet God is proclaimed more forthrightly, and His glory is exalted more, when we gather together to seek His blessing, hear His Word together, sing His praises together, pray to Him together, and give to the greater work of the Kingdom together.

3. Congregational worship is more edifying than private worship. You can watch church on TV or your device, yet you know it isn't the same interactive experience you have at church. You can watch a sporting event on television (some of you even watch *golf*), yet the sheer experience is nothing compared to being in the stadium or at the golf course personally with hundreds or thousands of others who each appreciate the larger shared event. One may find more detail in watching a Purdue game on the TV, yet the experience of being with tens of thousands cheering on the team at Ross-Ade Stadium is more satisfying and more worth sharing than being at home by yourself. (By the way, it will prove a mighty challenge for the team sports to actually play *well* if the stands are empty this Fall).

4. God can be experienced in unique ways in congregational worship. The ordinances of the Church are those commands of the Lord which require two or more Christians to be carried out. They may be fully experienced *only* in the gathered congregation.

5. Jesus regularly participated in congregational worship. What example did Jesus set? His pattern was to attend worship at the weekly Sabbath service at the local synagogue, and also the larger worship events and festivals at the Jerusalem Temple.

6. Congregational worship is more like Heaven. Whitney says, "Nothing you do on a consistent basis is more like the activity of heaven than worshiping God with His people."

We have experienced a steady buildup since opening services on May 10. We look forward to the day when we ALL may be back in worship, from the youngest to the oldest, and including the healthy and the infirm. May you yearn for and be there with us on that day of full worship once again.