

The Walk: 1. Worship – a living Hallelujah
Psalm 100
September 26, 2021
Pastor Steve Richards

Christians often talk about walking with Christ. The twelve disciples did this, walking alongside Jesus for three years, listening, learning, and growing in faith. Today, what does this walk look like? How do we grow spiritually close? How can we close the gap between the Christians we are and the Christians we want to be? For the next five weeks, we will examine five essential practices that will help us be the persons God wants us to be.

Let me tell you about my grandson! We spent last Monday together but because it was a rainy day, we had to be indoors. Here we are reading a book (photo), but his attention span on Monday was like that of a fly. And after lunch, I was hoping he would settle down for a nap, but every time I suggested that he said, “No, no, no.” But it got to a point where he was so tired that he began picking on the dog, pulling the dog’s ears, and poking his nose. So I picked up Basil, carried him down to the basement and there in the dark I paced back and forth until he put his head on my shoulder. And I kept saying to him, “Basil is a kind and gentle little boy.” Over and over again, “Basil is a kind and gentle boy.” I’m not sure he fully understands kind and gentle but he’s beginning to put a few words together and later that afternoon I heard him say that he is kind and gentle. I think something similar happens when we get close to Jesus. He speaks the truth into our hearts and minds so that it gets reflected in our words and actions. And we need certain practices that will keep us close. After dinner as Basil and I were waiting for his mother to pick him up, we walked to the corner and back. In the past week, he heard someone say – “Oh my gosh.” And on Monday it was his favorite phrase. As we walked hand in hand, we would stop as I pointed out a tree or a squirrel, a stick on the sidewalk, and then as we stood at the corner and I pointed up at the sky – and each time I called attention to something, he said, “oh my gosh!” as if it was the greatest thing he had ever seen.

That brought such joy to my heart, but I also imagined the joy it must bring to God that one of his creatures would look at what God had made and respond with such joy – oh my gosh! That’s worship. It is also the first of the five essential practices.

In Psalm 95, we find these words: **Come, let us worship and bow down!** Worship is our response to what we value most. What matters most to you? A relationship, some possession, a dream, your status, some kind of pleasure? Whatever is worth the most to you is what you worship. Jesus said, “Wherever your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” It’s what we worship, and as a result worship becomes the driving force for all we do. Follow the trail of time, money, energy and it will lead to a throne and on that throne is what we worship. I’ll leave you to contemplate what or who is actually on your throne. But remember, actions speak louder than words. You can come here one hour a week, but there are 168 hours in every week. Who or what are you worshipping the other 167 hours? Follow the trail.

St. Augustine said: “Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until we find rest in thee.” There is something deep within us that is drawn to something or someone greater than ourselves. Haven’t you watched a sunset or looked into another person’s eyes felt a certain awe and gratitude? If it’s not the God of gods, there will be something on that throne. But the only one who can fully satisfy the deepest long of the human heart is the God who made us. When worship of God becomes the rhythm of our lives it changes everything. And this morning, I want to focus when God is on that throne.

We say that God is Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer which we associate with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **1.Creator - Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his.** Before anything else, there was God. Science can explain a lot about this world, but behind it all is God. Before anything – is God. Every day, my life depends on God. I exist for the pleasure of God. I don't know how long I have in this world, but today is a gift and I get to choose how to respond to this gift. Every morning when I wake up, my first thought: "woohoo! I've been given a new day. Thank you, God, for everything." And then I add, "I give my life to you."

Some mornings, I walk outside and sit in our backyard while it is still dark, waiting for the sun to rise. And I listen to the quiet, and then a squirrel runs across the yard to a feeder we've set up just for squirrels, and then it is the birds that arrive, bluejays that grab peanuts in the shell and chickadees – and I hear the neighborhood begin to come to life. And all I can do is say thank you, God. When I take the time to see what is happening I see the handiwork of God. Celtic Christians called such moments "thin places" where we feel the presence of God, places where heaven and earth are so close that we catch a glimpse of eternity. Many of you told me you have a specific place – at the lake or early morning walk through the neighborhood, or it's when the light shines through the stained-glass windows on a Sunday morning or it's a moment when you are holding a child or you walk hand in hand with another person. "Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth... Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his."

2. Then, there is God, the Son, the **Redeemer.** The Gospel of John says "The word became flesh and dwelt among us." Or remember when the Magi came to Bethlehem, they said, "We have come to worship him." When we look at Jesus, we have the chance to see the invisible God, to know God's character. And when we recognize who Jesus is, our response is to worship him. His words 2000 years ago still bring life to those who hear, and his acts of compassion and mercy continue to this day. Thank you, Jesus, for accepting us, sinners that we are and redeeming us. When Jesus hangs on the cross, we are meant to hear him say: "There is something terribly wrong when the people considered holiest would hang me on the cross." And we often forget he's talking to us. We say: "We're not so bad... there are people a lot worse than me. I pay my taxes. I try to be nice. And I'm here." If that's true, do you really need Jesus, the Jesus on the cross? When I take a good long look at my life, I need what Jesus offers. Consider for a moment, what are called the seven deadly sins: lust, gluttony, greed, indifference to the suffering of others, anger, envy, and pride. I don't have to think very long until I run to the cross and hear God say, "I love you this much. No matter what you have done you are loved."

Recently, I came across the story of Shirley Dygert. She decided that for her 54th birthday she would jump out of an airplane from 13,000 feet. Shirley's instructor was a man named Dave Hartsock, and Shirley would be strapped to Dave in what's called a tandem jump. When they left the plane, it was exhilarating and terrifying at the same time. Then Dave pulled the cord but the parachute did not open fully, so he pulled the cord for the reserve chute and it got tangled up just like the first. They are falling, the ground is getting closer and closer, but the parachutes won't open. Moments before impact, Dave tells Shirley to lift her legs and he rotates the two of them so that when they hit the ground he would take the full impact and she would be on top of him. He would act as her cushion. Amazingly, she walked away from the impact with just minor injuries. Dave also survived but he is completely paralyzed except for partial movement in his right arm. If you were Shirley, how would you respond to what Dave did? What do you do in response to someone who put himself in harm's way to save your life? Do you send a thank you note? Return once a year to say thanks? Or every single day be grateful that he sacrificed everything so that you could live. **God has reconciled you by his physical body through death, to present you before God as a people who are holy, faultless, and without blame.** (Colossians 1:22)

3. Sustainer. Jesus says to his disciples then and now: I will not leave you alone, I will send a comforter to sustain you called the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will dwell in you and guide you and empower you to live. When you became Christian, you invited the Holy Spirit to be at work in you. And any experience of God in your life is an experience of the Holy Spirit. Some of you have told me that you can be here in worship and hear something that touches you in such a way that tears come. People will say, Pastor Steve you made me cry. That wasn't me. That's the Holy Spirit. If I hear music and it somehow touches me deeply, it's not the musicians, it's the Holy Spirit. The musicians were the instruments. I've had people tell me that the first time they ever enter this building, they felt something come over them – that's the Holy Spirit. Or maybe you received a phone call at the exact moment you needed it or you made that phone call at the exact moment someone else needed it – that was the Holy Spirit at work. Or you read scripture and you feeling something or you've prayed and felt at peace. That's the Holy Spirit who stays with you and sustains you – and how can we not give praise.

In his book, Ken Sande tells the story of seeing a blind woman walking with her Seeing Eye dog, a golden retriever. The woman seemed to know where she was going, but the dog noticed a car parked in the street blocking the crosswalk and so the dog nudged her legs signaling to stop. The woman felt around and nothing was there so she pulled the dog's leash to go forward. The dog moved only a short distance and again nudged her and stopped. This time she was irritated. She knew nothing was there so she spoke a command and jerked the leash rather harshly. Once again, the dog stopped right at the car. The woman was angry and smacked the dog on the nose and jerked the leash to move forward and she ran right into the car. And as Ken watched from the other side of the street, the woman crouched down in tears and hugged the dog, apologizing for the way she had treated her dog who was trying to guide her. The Holy Spirit will guide you every day if you will only listen and pay attention. "Come, let us worship and bow down." And when I bow down before God, I am opening myself to God's Spirit. And this is what worship does for us when we let God be what's on the throne of our lives.

So let me suggest a daily pattern in which we stop, humble ourselves, and give thanks to the one who sits upon our throne. Hold up your hand. Let your hand be your reminder to stop, humble yourself, and give thanks 5 times each day. When you wake up – Thank you, God, for everything. At breakfast, lunch, and dinner – pause, bow down, and say "Thank you, God, for everything." And then when you go to bed. It does something inside when our first thought and our final thought each day is thank you.

When our children were little, my favorite moments were when I could hold each of them in my arms – to be close enough to do that. I would come home, and they would come running and hug me or if something was not right, they would climb into my lap or sometimes they just wanted my arm around them or to hold my hand. In their teenaged years, that changed and didn't happen as often but it still happened. Today, they live a 15 minute drive from our home and we see each other at least once a week. The best part for me is when it's time to leave and I'll say, "I love you." And she will say, I love you, Dad. That's what we do here. Once a week, we stop and say, "God, thank you. I love you." And God's response is to hold you tight and reply, "I love you too." How can you not say this is the most important thing I do each week? Every day to take time to worship and bow down.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of September 26, 2021

Weekly Prayer: Lord of all creation, as we open our eyes to this new day, we see the beauty of all that you have created. With awe and wonder, we want to give you praise and thanks for all

you have done. Let your Spirit move through our lives and renew our souls. Breathe life into us once again so that our lives will be offerings of praise to you. Amen.

Monday, September 27

Scripture: Luke 22:14-19; John 11:35-42

When the time came, Jesus took his place at the table, and the apostles joined him. He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. I tell you, I won't eat it until it is fulfilled in God's kingdom." After taking a cup and giving thanks, he said, "Take this and share it among yourselves. I tell you that from now on I won't drink from the fruit of the vine until God's kingdom has come." After taking the bread and giving thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Jesus began to cry. The Jews said, "See how much he loved him!" But some of them said, "He healed the eyes of the man born blind. Couldn't he have kept Lazarus from dying?"

Jesus was deeply disturbed again when he came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone covered the entrance. Jesus said, "Remove the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said, "Lord, the smell will be awful! He's been dead four days." Jesus replied, "Didn't I tell you that if you believe, you will see God's glory?" So they removed the stone. Jesus looked up and said, "Father, thank you for hearing me. I know you always hear me. I say this for the benefit of the crowd standing here so that they will believe that you sent me."

Observation: The creator of the world, the ruler of the universe, chose to become flesh and live on earth as a human being (John 1:14). Would you expect such a being to have the ultimate attitude of entitlement, to demand everything that was his by right? Well, we know Jesus didn't do that. As he gave us a model of what it means to be fully human, the gospels showed that his healthy human life included giving thanks in many different settings.

Application: Do you think Jesus' reasons for praying were different from your reasons for prayer? Why do you believe Jesus prayed at all, and didn't just say, "I'm the son of God—I can handle this on my own"? If you had been one of the first disciples, what difference, if any, do you imagine you would have noticed in Jesus after he had been praying? Take this time to share everything with God, and with gratitude acknowledge that God longs to be invited into every part of our lives.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, at one point, praying, you said, "Thank you for hearing me. I know you always hear me." Help me share that confidence and say "thank you" in my own prayers. Amen.

Tuesday, September 28

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:15-18

Make sure no one repays a wrong with a wrong, but always pursue the good for each other and everyone else. Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in every situation because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Observation: We often think gratitude is purely a feeling, a reaction to something outside of us. That makes "give thanks in every situation" puzzling, because some situations do not trigger positive feelings. But researcher Robert Emmons wrote, "It is vital to make a distinction between feeling grateful and being grateful. Being grateful is a choice, a prevailing attitude that endures and is relatively immune to the gains and losses that flow in and out of our lives."

Application: A recurring theme in gratitude research is that choosing to be a grateful person does not mean you become blind to the bad things in life, or the sad or angry feelings you may have about them. It does mean, however, that we also choose not to let the bad things blind us to the things for which we are grateful. What way(s) have you found to remember the things for which you are grateful when your life takes a difficult turn?

Prayer: O God, you are like the sun, always shining your love and mercy into my life, whatever may happen in my family, my workplace or my health. Help me learn how to keep my focus on you every day. Amen.

Wednesday, September 29

Scripture: Philippians 4:6-7

Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.

Observation: Paul did not write this counsel from some abstract ivory tower, sheltered from all trouble or conflict. He was in prison when he wrote Philippians. When some other teachers scorned his ministry in Corinth, he sent the Corinthian Christians a vivid portrait of his challenging path of service (2 Corinthians 11:23-28). He knew well what it meant to give thanks in every situation.

Application: Artists and photographers know that often how we frame a picture alters what we focus on in it. Paul urged a kind of framing in Philippians 4. When we bring the things that cause us stress into prayer, we put ourselves and our troubles inside a much bigger picture: the story of God's love for us in Jesus Christ – and that leads to thanksgiving. What helps you remember to look at life's big picture more than the unpleasant little details? What part of today's reading can you keep in your heart and mind throughout the day?

Prayer: Lord, the Psalmist wrote, "I keep your word close, in my heart" (Psalm 119:11). I ask for your help as I, too, seek to keep your teaching close in my memory and my heart. Amen.

Thursday, September 30

Scripture: Psalm 95:1-7

Come, let's sing out loud to the LORD! Let's raise a joyful shout to the rock of our salvation!
Let's come before him with thanks! Let's shout songs of joy to him!
The LORD is a great God, the great king over all other gods.
The earth's depths are in his hands; the mountain heights belong to him;
the sea, which he made, is his along with the dry ground, which his own hands formed.
Come, let's worship and bow down! Let's kneel before the LORD, our maker!
He is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, the sheep in his hands.
If only you would listen to his voice right now!

Observation: Israel's understanding of the one God they worshiped developed over time. At times, they adapted language from the cultures around them, as in verse 3 of today's reading. They tended to refer to all supernatural beings, who the New Testament and most Christians call angels, as gods. But God was the great person they worshiped and thanked, the "great king over all other gods."

Application: Verse 7 echoes many other psalms (including Psalm 23) in identifying us as sheep for whom God cares as a shepherd. The image may have been clearer to pastoral Israelites than to modern city dwellers. Sheep are utterly dependent on their shepherd to keep them fed, watered and safe. Left to their own devices, they tend to be helpless to ensure their own survival. How grateful are you that in a big, complex universe you are one of God's sheep, watched over with caring and love?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for promising to be the "good shepherd" who cares for me, who doesn't run away in the face of trouble, but is always there. I gratefully worship and praise you. Amen.

Friday, October 1

Scripture: Psalm 96:1-2

Sing to the LORD a new song!
Sing to the LORD, all the earth!
Sing to the LORD! Bless his name!
Share the news of his saving work every single day!

Observation: Worship is not limited to one hour (or even one day) each week. Psalm 96 anticipated much modern psychological research as it invited us to express gratitude for God's saving work every single day. The apostle Paul similarly urged Colossian Christians to "overflow with thanksgiving" and "be thankful people" (Colossians 2:7, 3:12-17). Each day and hour of our week can be a time of gratitude, an ongoing act of worship.

Application: Some of us are musically gifted, and we like the idea of "sing to the Lord a new song." Others, of course, remain silent through the singing parts of worship, whether traditional or contemporary. Regardless of our musical aptitude or tastes, what is the inner spirit of gratitude expressed by the poetic imagery of singing to the Lord a new song? How can all of us join in that spiritual experience?

Prayer: Lord of my life, continue touching and transforming me to make my every day, ordinary life an offering of gratitude to you, an ongoing act of worship. Amen.

Saturday, October 2

Scripture: Psalm 92:1-5

It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, Most High;
to proclaim your loyal love in the morning, your faithfulness at nighttime
with the ten-stringed harp, with the melody of the lyre
because you've made me happy, LORD, by your acts. I sing with joy because of your handiwork.
How awesome are your works, LORD! Your thoughts are so deep!

Observation: The psalmist wrote long ago: "It is good to give thanks to the LORD." Here's some research that supports the goodness of giving thanks: Take just a few minutes each day to jot down things that make you thankful, from the generosity of friends to the food on your table or the right to vote. List-keepers sleep better, exercise more and gain a general contentment that may counteract stress and contribute to overall health. The ultimate source of joy in Psalm 92 was God's loyal love and faithfulness, realities that are always with us if we just recognize them.

Application: In verse 2, the psalmist spoke of expressing gratitude to God in the morning and at nighttime. In what ways have you built, or will you build, recognizing and expressing gratitude into your habit patterns, so that you don't always have to try to remember to do it? Spend some time today praying about choices you can make to incorporate gratitude more fully into your daily practices as a Christ follower.

Prayer: If it is not your custom to pray before every meal, take a moment to offer a blessing over your meal. Taking time to connect with God at this routine time will give you a time to reflect on the gift of the meal that you are sharing. Consider one of these prayers:

- Be present at our table, Lord. Be here and everywhere adored. These mercies bless and grant that we, may live in fellowship with thee.
- Thank you for the food we eat, thank you for the friends we meet, thank you for the birds that sing, thank you, God for everything.