

## **Worship & Prayer**

An Lent sermon by Pastor Rob Hamilton in the The Walk  
Delivered on March 6, 2022  
on the following texts:

### **1 Chronicles 16:29 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)**

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;  
bring an offering, and come before him.  
Worship the Lord in holy splendor;

### **Psalms 29:1-2 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)**

Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings,<sup>[a]</sup>  
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.  
Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name;  
worship the Lord in holy splendor.

### **Matthew 18:20 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)**

**20** For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

### **John 4:23 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)**

**23** But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.

### **Revelation 4:11 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)**

“You are worthy, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honor and power,  
for you created all things,  
and by your will they existed and were created.”

## **Preamble**

Hi, I am Rob Hamilton, Senior Pastor at the United Methodist Church of Geneva and thank you for sharing your time and energy on this first Sunday of Lent. As we’ve heard refer-

enced already, Lent is a season in the life of the church of penitence and preparation for the new life of Easter. In the ancient church, those looking to become Christian or to be baptized spent the 6 weeks of Lent preparing for their baptism, ready to die to their former way of living to take on new life in Christ.

In some ways, I'd invite us to think of this Lent as spring training as Christians. Being a Christian, is a daily walk in the footsteps of Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit to a closer relationship with God. The result of a fruitful spring training would be that we we find ourselves in deeper love with God and love of neighbor.

And since we've haven't had any spring training for Major League Baseball yet, we'll just have to start working out ourselves. To help us in our spring training for the next 5 Sunday's I am going to be preaching from 5 core or essential spiritual practices highlighted in a book called *The Walk* by Adam Hamilton. (No relation, other than he's another United Methodist pastor) Now the 5 core practices of Worship and Prayer, Study, Serving, Giving and Sharing named in this book are really just an update on the core practiced shared by United Methodists for the past 54 years and beyond. In our services that welcome new members to the Walk of the Christian faith as United Methodists we focus in on prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness. I'm even leading book and sermon discussion on Sundays at 10:30am in the parlor and simultaneously on zoom if you want to dig even deeper into each of these 5 practices.

Also, this Lent, our pastors and staff have put together a calendar to help us all with our spring training. We have an entire calendar of ways to support you in these 5 practices we are learning about. It's designed for you to jump right in. You don't have to wait for the sermon on the specific core practice to begin your training. Just read this calendar and jump in using the details on the back.

I think that is enough of an intro to Lent and our Lenten theme. I am eager to get started teaching and preaching about Worship and Prayer today. Good news is that everyone worshipping today onsite or online has already started spring training strong by engaging in worship and prayer today.

Let's build on that by pausing here for prayer.

## **Prayer of Illumination**

Most Holy God, we come before you today first to worship you. To recognize that all that we have comes as a gift from you and to thank you for all that you have done are doing and will continue to do in our lives. We also come today admitting we are empty and have missed the mark and so we want to fill up our lives with your divine energy. We also come wanting to know more about you and your will and way for our lives. Help us in these moments and through this message to better understand your call upon our lives. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

## **Sermon**

Today, we are going to dive deep on worship and prayer. Worship and prayer is the first core practice of walking in the footsteps of Jesus because its one of the spiritual practices Jesus attends to first before he begins his day of studying, serving, giving and sharing. Mark's gospel begins in chapter 1 with *"In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. 36 And Simon and his companions hunted for him. 37 When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." 38 He answered, "Let us go*

*on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.” 39 And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.”*

Now, I know all the night owls might be cringing right now, hoping I don't say you have to get up before the sun to pray and be a good Christian. I am one who is up before the sun, I lace up and run to pray in the morning, while few others are still awake. But I can tell you while early morning prayer is powerful it isn't the only way to be faithful in prayer.

In fact, we see worship and prayer throughout all of scripture. I had Pastor Mary Gay read us 4 different passages ranging from the Old Testament all the way to the end of the Bible in Revelation to show us that as we read the Bible, we can only go a few pages before we're seeing God's people engaging in worship and prayer. Apparently, worship and prayer are hugely important to the life of God's faithful people and certainly those who walk in the footsteps of Jesus. So what exactly are worship and prayer, you might ask? While coming to church and bowing our heads or saying Our Father... are all parts of worship and prayer. There is more to it than that.

We talked about worship a few weeks ago in our David series. Worship is the rites and rituals of giving honor and praise to God. If we believe God is the source of all life and that God loves everyone. If we believe God is for us and not against us; redeeming the mess we make of life and is the One who made a pathway for us to share in life abundant and eternal through Jesus Christ: Then God is worthy of our devotion; of giving God praise; of saying thank you. Worship keeps us focused on God and not the lesser gods of self or image or wealth or of being right all the time. Worship reminds us of who God is, what God is doing and that as a response to God's activity in our lives we offer God our thanks and praise. This keeps us in an ever deepening relationship with God.

Same is true of prayer. Prayer is conversation with God. Notice I said conversation. A conversation goes two ways, right? We speak and we listen and not just listen to respond, but listen to deeply understand. Prayer is more than asking for something and its meant to be more than the words we say in church or recite from memory - though those are important prayers. Prayer is one of the primary ways we communicate and connect with God and each other.

When I talk about worship and prayer I often like to make the analogy to a romantic relationship. If you've ever been in or are still in a romantic relationship there is almost always communication and signs or acts of affection shared between the couple. It would be extremely difficult to have a romantic relationship with someone who never communicates or only talks about themselves and never stops to listen and/or with someone who never offers any gestures of some signs of affection, interest or love. God wants to be in a loving relationship with us.

God's primary love languages are all 5 of the love languages, giving gifts of life and beautiful world, wanting to spend quality time with us, sharing words of affirmation and even relating to us by touch through taking on flesh in Jesus Christ. Worship and prayer are foundational to being in that loving relationship with God as we follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

I recently spent time with Carol Zars who grew up in this church reflecting on the practices of Worship and Prayer and I asked her to share a little bit about their worship and prayer practices as fellow UMCers who are growing and maturing in their practice of this first core Christian practice:

I like how in the interview I heard Carol talk about praying with God as constant, intimate conversation. I appreciated her openness to exploring different prayer forms and we will have some of those prayer forms available to you this Lent. I also appreciated Carol's use of keeping a prayer list on her phone to honor her commitment to pray for others and not forget.

In Adam Hamilton's book, he suggests that the practice to strive for is to worship with no more than 5 absences from worship a year wither in person or online. And to pray 5 times a day upon waking and upon going to bed and at all five meals.

For those just getting started, there are some awesome prayer apps out there, but you don't need an app or a class to get started. Just talk to God like a friend. **Upon waking: greet God, thank God for the day, ask God to guide your steps and to help you grow in your practices.**

**At meal times: thank God for food and those who labored for you to eat and ask that it fuel you in your walk.**

**At bedtime: thank God for the day, apologize for anyways you missed the mark, forgive others, give God a chance to speak.**

As we wrap up today, I want remind us this is practice and spring training. These are practices we will be honing all of our lives. This is the process called sanctification. You don't have to be awesome out the gate. Baseball teams can have a great spring training and an awful regular season. Spring training can also help work out the rough spots and help teams get ready for the regular season.

Its all practice and we are blessed to not walk this road alone. We walk together in the grace of God.

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