

**The Reverend Jon Hauerwas – October 17, 2021 – Grounded in Worship**  
**Psalm 100:1-5 and Romans 12:1-5**

Worship is the central practice of the Christian church. It is here that we become grounded in sacred rituals, elevated in purpose and common calling, and joined together in fellowship and love. In worship, congregations are inspired, renewed, and challenged to commit ourselves to joyful service. In this place, we reflect deeply on God's word, are moved by the beauty of music, and are graced by the work of the Holy Spirit, as we strive to welcome the beloved kingdom, the fellowship of Christ on earth.

Through the peaks and valleys of this life, the church is our spiritual home. This is the place where we gather and pray. This is where ask for God's forgiveness, and hear the assurance of God's mercy. This is the place where we stand on the shoulders of spiritual guides who authored the confessions which enlighten our way. Without worship, we are not a people. We are scattered. Aimless. Blown about in the breeze. Divided. And so we give thanks for the opportunity to bear witness to all that God is doing in our lives this day as the one body of Christ.

Today, on this particular Sabbath, we find ourselves in the midst of a stewardship campaign, attending to our ongoing commitments to the church of Jesus

Christ. And as this season presses ahead, and Westminster seeks to rise from the tumult of Covid-19, I ask you to reflect on what this congregation means to you and to your spiritual development. I invite you to consider if you are a more faithful, more compassionate, or more grateful than you were when you first set foot in this sanctuary. I encourage you to consider if Westminster has made you less attentive to the faults of others, more willing to serve, or more interested in studying the scriptures. Friends, has this community enriched your prayer life, guided you through challenging times, or provided a shoulder to support you in times of need? While these are pertinent questions in every season, they are particularly meaningful now.

Life, itself, is dynamic and fluid. And as God's people, we are forever changing, growing, learning, adapting, and achieving – not in order that we might boast, but so that we might give thanks for the transformative work of God in our lives. And so, we come, bearing our concerns and insights, our hopes and fears, our successes and failures. In worship, we hand all of these things over to God, and we ask that God will use them to mold us in Christ's image.

Today, as you consider those with whom you share this fellowship, what do you see? A room full of strangers, or a network of relationships, a spirit of

generosity, and a gathering of gifts to be used for the greater glory of God? I recognize that there are a number of you have been a part of this congregation for a relatively short time. Yet, you continue to return each week because there is something here that fills you up. Something about this fellowship which meets your needs. Something about this place which reminds you that God is still speaking.

And just as we, as individuals, are constantly evolving and changing, so is the church. No congregation is the same from one week to the next. Some of those who joined us in worship last week are unable to do so today. Meanwhile, others are experiencing our fellowship for the very first time, whether in-person or online. And even if, hypothetically, the very same participants were to take part from one week to the next, our fellowship would still be different. For we have each changed in some way, large or small, since we last celebrated the Sabbath together. And because this is a new day, we have the opportunity to hear old words in a new way, and then go out and demonstrate the goodness of God's intentions.

Doris Kearns Goodwin is a presidential historian and author of *Team of Rivals: the Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*. While delivering a TED talk a number of years ago, Goodwin noted the following attributes about Lincoln: "He possessed an uncanny ability to empathize with and think about other people's point

of view. He repaired injured feelings that might have escalated into permanent hostility. He shared credit with ease. He assumed responsibility for the failure of his subordinates. He constantly acknowledged his errors and learned from his mistakes. He refused to be provoked by petty grievances. He never submitted to jealousy or brooded over perceived slights.”<sup>1</sup>

Reflecting upon these claims, Mindy Douglas observes that Lincoln “saw himself as one part of a great system” in which “each individual played a significant part. He served with humility, never needing to put others down in order to elevate himself.”<sup>2</sup> And he refused to believe that any one person or committee should shoulder the burden for the whole.<sup>3</sup>

Friends, this is an important lesson for us in the midst of a stewardship season. For it is common for both clergy and lay leaders to take on too many roles at once. While seeking to be good stewards of the gifts we have been given, and striving to meet pressing needs, well-intentioned leaders often experience burnout. Meanwhile, there are others in the congregation who are waiting in the wings, “hoping for their

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<sup>1</sup> Doris Kearns Goodwin, TED2008, “Lessons from Past Presidents”, [https://www.ted.talks/doris\\_kearns\\_goodwin\\_on\\_learning\\_from\\_past\\_presidents](https://www.ted.talks/doris_kearns_goodwin_on_learning_from_past_presidents).

<sup>2</sup> Mindy Douglas, *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, Year A, Volume 3*, ed. Joel B. Green (Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 257.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas, 257.

gifts to be recognized and affirmed.”<sup>4</sup> It is vital, then, for every congregation to ask: how might we do a better job “of claiming the gifts among us and allowing the body to flourish in significant ways that do not lead to burnout, resentment, or underfunctioning?”<sup>5</sup> This is part of the important work that is before us this day. For in order to successfully navigate the transitions before us, the church needs the support of committed disciples who are willing to answer the call and to give of themselves.

You are aware that our music today was selected in memory of Martha Nelson. Dr. Nelson served as an elder at Westminster on three separate occasions. Professionally, she was the longest serving Health Commissioner in the state of Ohio, providing leadership in Summit County for 38 years until her retirement in 1996. To thrive in that role for so long, it was essential for Martha to encourage the best in others, and to honor the gifts and skills of the many talented people with whom she worked. In both her professional and spiritual vocations, Martha was a steward of the gifts that had been entrusted to her, giving her all and leaving an example for each of us about faithful discipleship in every realm of life.

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<sup>4</sup> Douglas, 257.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas, 257.

May all thanks be to God for the lives we have been given. Amen.