

“Passionate Worship”

Five Fruitful Practices, part 2

2 Samuel 6:12-22

[title slide] Good morning. I am so glad you have joined us today. Somebody told me, “Pastor, remind the congregation what a great church we have.” It’s true. Grace UMC is not perfect, but it is great. I appreciate how each one of you makes this place a welcoming house of worship for our community.

Would you please pray with me? “Lord, if you have anything you want to tell me this morning, I’m ready to listen. I want to worship you with all my heart, all my soul, all my mind, and all my strength. Search me and know me. Show me the way you want me to live, so that I can glorify you. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.”

[Fruitful] Last week, we started a new series based on the book, “Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations” by Bishop Robert Schnase. I am challenging us as a church to ask how we are producing spiritual fruit. Remember, our purpose is “To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” Everything we do is centered on Jesus Christ and loving and serving him.

[Abraham] Last Sunday, we covered the practice of “Radical Hospitality.” We talked about how the way we welcome people should reveal how desperate we are to help others know God’s love and grace through Jesus. This is everyone’s job, not just the pastor and the ushers. Radical Hospitality is different from ordinary hospitality in that it is sacrificial, extravagantly generous, and is offered to complete strangers. Radical Hospitality is what God shows us, embodied in the unconditional love of Jesus Christ.

So my first question for you this morning is, what is one thing you have decided to do to show Radical Hospitality to others? Let’s hear your ideas.

[Passionate worship] Today I want to talk about Passionate Worship. If Radical Hospitality is about the invitation, Passionate Worship is about the event. What does Passionate Worship really mean? What are we inviting people to?

[Question] Let me put it this way: What do you expect in worship today? *(Pause to solicit answers.)* One of the things I expect is that God will show up in someone’s life because we are here together. I believe we should set our

expectations high every morning. We should expect that the Spirit of Jesus Christ is going to move powerfully among us and transform us.

[Rose Bowl] Being passionate means giving your all to something or someone. When have you given your all to make something happen? For me, it was the 1996 Rose Bowl parade and football game that I marched in with Northwestern University. We practiced for weeks to perfect our music. We bought new uniforms for the band. When we flew out to California, we spent days practicing our songs and drill. We gave nine performances in five days, playing in front of hundreds of thousands of spectators and millions on TV. We were so excited to give our best that the inconvenience of travel and long hours of practice were worth it.

[Question] And that was all just for a parade and football game. Think about a time when you were passionate about something. When was the last time you gave your all? What was your motivation? What did people say who watched what you were doing?

Sunday morning is not a performance. It’s much more than that. Our real audience is God, not people. True worship is not just an hour on Sunday, although that’s a big part of it. Worship is giving God our absolute best in every area of our lives, so that God’s name can be glorified.

[Passionate Worship] We can learn a lot about worship through King David’s example. In David’s time, the Israelites had the Ark of the Covenant, a big box that represented God’s presence. It traveled with them everywhere. It was the number one symbol of their God, of their nation, of their worship. After it got lost in a battle, David went to get it back.

Returning the ark to Jerusalem was a huge deal. David spared no expense. He involved the whole community. All the priests helped; all the people participated; there were hundreds of musicians. They even had a feast. Food was a huge part of the celebration and worship of God.

[David – the right way] It was important to David that the ark was brought back the right way. The previous attempt had been sloppy, and the priests had been punished. So David gave his best. He practiced passionate worship. Look at 2 Samuel 6:13. David only took six steps towards Jerusalem before immediately

sacrificing to God. All the way to Jerusalem, he danced with all his might before the Lord.

[Michal did not approve] As you read this story, you get the sense that everybody was excited....everybody, that is, except for David’s wife, Michal. Apparently, this parade didn’t meet her expectations. The music was too loud. The clothes were inappropriate. David’s shenanigans were too immature for her. The scripture says, she despised David in her heart. (2 Samuel 6:16)

David tried to set her straight. He pointed out that God was the object of his worship, not her. This parade was not for her benefit. And he said, to worship God, he would be even more passionate, even more “undignified” if he had to. He knew the object of his worship: God Almighty, who was pleased with his effort. David’s worship was excellent. Passionate. David would sing, “I will dance, I will sing, to be mad for my King. Nothing, Lord, is hindering this passion in my soul.” (*song by David Crowder*)

[Question] I want to ask you a very personal question this morning. Are you more like Michal, or more like David?

The Michal’s of this world are heavily influenced by consumerism. They treat Sunday worship like a concert, like a movie, or a meal at a restaurant...in other words, something to consume. They criticize and find themselves very disappointed. If we value the service simply as entertainment, we will not experience passionate worship.

By contrast, the David’s of this world don’t consume worship, they are consumed in worship. They sacrifice to make it excellent. What do you need to do so that your worship is excellent? What spirit are you bringing to your worship? Are you like the psalmist who says, “My soul longs for the courts of God”? (Psalm 84:2)

Your personal devotion and prayer life affect your ability to experience Sunday worship. If Sunday is the only time you try to follow Jesus Christ, you’re going to dry up, spiritually. You cannot survive on one meal a week, on one drink in seven days. Sunday is a critical part of your spiritual growth, but it is not the only part.

[Passionate worship] When you and I give our all to God in worship, something incredible happens. The sum is greater than the individual parts. Passionate worship is marked by congregational participation. Look at how many people David involved in his worship. It’s the same for us. We all need to find a way to be involved if we want our worship to be excellent and passionate. Sometime, read John Wesley’s instructions for singing in the front pages of our hymnal. Our founder expected passionate worship from the people called Methodists. The truth is, we all have a part to play in this drama that unfolds before God.

When we start focusing on passionate worship, our other agendas fade into the background. Worship is no longer about a musical style or a liturgical form or a particular bible translation. Worship becomes an expression, a desire to give our absolute best for God. How will we engage all the people who have accepted our Radical Hospitality? How will we open our hearts and minds to hear from the God who loves us unconditionally, who sent Jesus Christ into the world to be our Lord and Savior? How will we embrace all those who are here to find forgiveness, hope, a new life, rest, peace, passion, purpose, love, joy? Do you get what I’m saying?

[Bible verse] Can we come to worship with the expectation of being fed? Matthew 5:6 says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.” Passionate worship is supposed to change us, transform us, embolden us. If it doesn’t, we’re going to have a weight problem. We’re going to keep getting fed and never burn off those calories!

We must do everything possible to make our worship excellent, engaging, meaningful, and memorable. We must realize that we are offering an invitation to Life. Passionate worship is the primary way we engage the story of God. If we can’t get excited, then we will show up to something bland. We cannot be consumers of worship. We’re not writing a movie review or a restaurant review. We are coming to experience God, the one who offers life through Jesus Christ.

[title slide] Friends, for better or for worse, we are all in this together. Grace United Methodist church is the people: the pastor, the ushers, the teachers, the children, the secretary, the single mom with doubts, the married

couple with resources, the teenager with questions, the widow with grief, the guy with a shovel and hammer that says, “What can I do?” It is all that and a hundred others, working together for one purpose: to make passionate disciples of Jesus Christ who, by their worship and their service, will transform the world. There is no better place to be, than in the strong, passionate embrace of our God, and to return that passion in our worship of our Lord and Creator.

As a reminder of the passionate worship we desire for our church, I want to close with a song called, “You Are God Alone.”

Memory Verse:

Psalm 84:1-2a: “How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord.”

Reflection questions:

1. What things in life are you most excited or passionate for?
2. How do you sustain your own personal devotional life and prepare your spirit for worship?
3. What difference does passionate worship of God make in your life?
4. What role does prayer play in passionate worship?
5. What can we do to make our worship as a congregation passionate, alive, engaging, creative, authentic and theologically sound?