

Holy Trinity Redditch



Life

Easter: Worship

Matthew 28:1-10

What is your experience of worship? I guess for many of us the answer will be every Sunday at our local church and this is, of course, a perfectly valid response. I am fortunate to have participated in worship in many and varied contexts: in the small country church; amidst the magnificence and splendour of our cathedrals; in the loud and busy setting of conferences; alone in secluded places, indoors or out. I'm sure you can add to these many more different experiences of worship.

But what, actually, *is* worship? Whilst worship is often identified with such things as location or occasion, what is its essence? The Oxford Dictionary describes worship as '*the feeling or expression of reverence and adoration for a deity,*' and this is a good place to start. As Christians, though, we do better still to appeal to Scripture to inform us:

- **עָבַד** The Hebrew root 'ebed is used in the Old Testament to mean *servant* and includes the idea of service of any kind: from acts of adoration to more mundane chores. In Exodus 3:12, God tells Moses, '*When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship ('ebed) God on this mountain.*'
- **Λατρεία** The Greek New Testament word *latreia* also indicates *worship* or *service*, depending on its particular context. In Luke 2:37, a widow '*never left the temple but worshipped (latreia) night and day, fasting and praying*'.
- **Λειτουργία** The Greek word *leitourgia* (cf. liturgy) is taken from secular life and refers to *service to the community or state*, frequently without charge or wage. For example, when Paul urges believers to '*abound in every good work*' (2 Corinthians 9), he says, '*this service (leitourgia) that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.*'

The clear implication here is that Christian worship and service are essentially one. God alone is to be worshipped or served (Exodus 20:1-3) with our whole being. Mind, emotions, physique and feelings are all to combine to God's praise and glory. The Bible includes descriptions of personal, individual worship (e.g. Psalms) as well as corporate acts (e.g. 2 Chronicles 7)¹.

With our church buildings now closed, now is a great opportunity to reassess our attitude to worship. Rather than having a close association to location or occasion, perhaps it's more about what we offer – to God and to one another. We express our worship through faithful service of God, generous 'good works' to others and to the community. After all, Jesus said, '*Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.*' (Matthew 25:40)

Our Gospel reading for this Easter Sunday is Matthew 28:1-10. The Risen Jesus greets the disciples who '*clasped his feet and worshipped him.*' Jesus immediately sends them out to tell the others. Surely our first response to the Risen Jesus must be to worship, too. Surely our call is to express our worship through service – not 'a service' in church this year, but service of a different kind. Perhaps the circumstances of Easter 2020 will enable us to see and experience our worship and service of Jesus Christ in a new way as we engage with God and one another as never before. Christ is Risen! Alleluia!

¹ New Dictionary of Theology, Ferguson/Wright, IV Press 2005

To Reflect upon this week

- What, for you, is worship? How do you express that worship? Will you be reassessing your view of worship this year?
- Whilst we're not able to access our church buildings, what opportunities can you find in our current restricted circumstances for worship? How might you be able to serve God, service one another and serve the wider community?
- Examine the other two Bible readings set for this Easter Sunday:

Exodus 14:10-end, 15:20-21. Moses parts the sea and saves the Israelites from the Egyptians.

Romans 6: 3-11. Paul reminds us we are *'alive to God in Christ Jesus'*.

Do they shed any light on your understanding of worship and how to express it?

- How important is Sunday worship to Christian discipleship? Is it more, or less, important than the other six days of the week?
- We sometimes hear people say, *"I'm a Christian, but I don't go to church."* Can you be a Christian and not go to church?

Paul Irving

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