

Christ Community Covenant Church
Five Smooth Stones
Stone 5: A Celebrating Church
'Everybody Loves A Party – And You're Invited!'
Pastor Gloria Merritt – June 24, 2012

Introduction

Well, "Surprise" might be the word of the day, if you're surprised to see that Dave is not preaching today and I am. Another surprise is that instead of talking about the 2nd value of being a Multiplying Church, we'll move to the 5th stone, which discusses our value of being a Celebrating Church – and what that means. In fact, the message title for today is "Everybody Loves a Party – And You're Invited." We might even say that today, it's a surprise party. Even I was surprised to be preaching this week, but it's all very good!

Let's begin with prayer, shall we? Heavenly Father may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you as I have the opportunity to share from my heart today with this church family of mine. We celebrate all that you are and all that you are doing to transform us into the image of your Son Jesus. It is in his name we pray. Amen.

I don't know about you, but I really like the simple mission statement that Dave has recently taught us. Do you remember it? "Love God, love others, and advance the Kingdom together!" It really boils it down, and I find myself repeating it. It has become part of my daily thoughts and language. I am able to ask myself, does this reflect that I love God? How am I loving others right now? Am I advancing the Kingdom with this activity? It simplifies things a lot. And, as we consider the finer points of how to do that, we are looking at Five Stones or values that seem to arise again and again in the philosophy and practice of our community here at 4Cs. The last two weeks raised the discussion of what it means to be a Family Church and a church for everyone in this family. Today we will begin the discussion of what it means to be a celebrating church.

(Play "Celebrate") Sorry, I couldn't help it. This is actually one of the songs that comes to my mind when I think of the word celebration. In some ways, it might be a worldly correlation, but I believe that almost all things can be redeemed for the Glory of God as long as they aren't profane in his eyes!

I decided to look up the word in the dictionary, always a good idea, right? I was actually SURPRISED by what I found there.

The Latin origin of the word celebrate leads to these definitions:

1. to observe or commemorate with ceremonies or festivities:
2. to make known publicly; proclaim:
3. to praise widely or to present widespread
4. to perform with appropriate rites and ceremonies; especially Mass and the Lord's Supper
5. to have or participate in a party, drinking spree, or uninhibited good time:

I honestly didn't realize that the word CELEBRATE is so closely related to what we do when we worship our Lord and King!

Celebrate and Participate:

Celebrate is a verb – it is something we DO. The word lends itself to joyful displays of activity and affection and emotion. John Piper tells us in his book *Desiring God* that "Biblical worship involves some kind of outward act. The very Hebrew word means to bow down. It is bowing, lifting hands, praying, singing, reciting, preaching, performing rites of eating, cleansing, ordaining, and so on." And if we are to benefit from it, which is what I believe God intended, then we are to participate.

If you'll take out your bulletins for a moment, you'll see the text chosen for today from the book of Revelation. While the book of Revelation is a book of prophecy, it is also a book that leads us to worship and to celebrate.

Let's read these words from **Revelation 19: 7, 9** -- "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready...Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!"

Remember here that the Lamb refers to the Lord Jesus Christ and that the bride refers to all who have professed him as Lord and Savior. It is the Church, his people, it is Us. And, hallelujah, we have been invited to the grandest celebration of them all! **THE WEDDING** of the Millenium. Talk about a party! I don't think that anyone on earth has had a wedding that could compare to what this wedding will be like! Not even Kate and Prince William. And, the most incredible thought is that **YOU** have been invited! **I** have been invited.

It's always an honor to receive a wedding invitation, to feel the blessing that the bride or groom and their families have included you in their circle or community of people that they feel has contributed to their lives somehow.

This afternoon Dave will be officiating at the wedding of Jenise Hughes and Max Neale. They are members here at 4Cs and their parents, Greg and Terri Hughes and Joanne and Alan Siebert are also active members, even leaders here. They are part of our church family. It will be a wonderful celebration, and I know that all of them are getting ready RIGHT now! The bride is making herself beautiful to present herself before her groom – and that's exactly what this scripture said – "Christ's bride has made herself ready!" What a lovely, lovely word picture God given.

What is amazing to me is this: The bride's beauty and preparation is actually for the GROOM! It is meant to honor him, celebrate him, it is even for his REKNOWN. The glory and beauty of the bride is a reflection of the groom. And, the groom, in his glory and honor lays down his life for the bride. Think about that for a moment and let it sink in.

With that thought, I now want to take this idea of celebration into the area of worship, since the two are so closely linked. For our church, we chose to use the word "celebration" as one of our five stones, because we believe it is even more encompassing than the specific word of worship. It goes even farther than worship.

So, why do we at Christ Community Covenant Church desire to be a celebrating church, a worshiping church? And, what are some ways that you see us doing that? It's your turn – would you call them out?

..... input from the audience

It is our hope with the worship celebrations at 4Cs, you might have noticed that we are intentional about a few things in our planning, whether week to week or seasonal. They are:

- that our celebrations are **transformational** – changing us from the inside out
- that we worship God **in spirit and in truth**
- that we have **a balance** of emotion and experience and edification
- that we incorporate **culturally relevant** history, music, preaching and art
- that our expressions of worship and celebration are **excellent**
- that we inspire **deeper personal** (non-corporate) worship experiences in the lives of believers

And, of course, we take our cues and instruction from Scripture. We are grateful that God helps us worship Him in the Book of Psalms, in which we see a whole range of emotions and feelings and circumstances.

In the New Testament when Jesus taught about worship, he crossed racial lines and gender specific lines and what-was-ceremonially-unclean lines by telling this to the adulterous Samaritan woman at the well:

John 4:23-24 The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

What in the world does that mean?

Worshiping in spirit

*NOT merely external *NOT empty formalism and traditionalism *DOES engage heart and emotions

[ILLUSTRATION – An emotionally disconnected marriage in which intimacy is difficult]

Worshiping in truth is

*Correct view of God. * Involving thought and intellect * Honestly knowing God

[ILLUSTRATION – knowing someone famous such as The Fray]

Is your God TOO SMALL?

Where feelings for God are dead, worship is dead.

Jesus warned the Pharisees when he quoted from Isaiah in **Matthew 15:8-9** ***“This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me.”***

As we continue our service, we are going to approach some of these feelings and emotions and affections of the heart by listing them and responding with Scripture and singing because Ephesians 5:18-20 reminds us to (and this is paraphrased a bit by me) ***“don’t adopt the world’s method of celebrating by getting yourself drunk, but let the Spirit fill your life. When you meet together, sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, as you praise the Lord with all your heart.***

Let’s let the remainder of this morning serve to transform us, allowing us to worship God in spirit and in truth, and to inspire us to worship God more deeply with all of our hearts, souls, mind and strength.

[Worship Team moves into place.]

Let’s begin with **godly fear**. It should have a rightful place in our worship:

Scripture: “The LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread” Is. 8:13

[Holy, Holy, Holy – a capella]

Then we move to **Contrition**:

Scripture: “I dwell in the high and holy place and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite” Is. 57:15

[Give us clean hands, give us pure hearts]

As God revives of our spirits, let’s express our **longing** for Him:

Scripture: “As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”

[As the deer panteth for the water]

God responds to the contrite longing of the soul. He comes and lifts the load of sin and fills our heart with gladness and **gratitude**. Scripture: “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” Romans 7:25a.

[Jesus Paid It All]

But our joy does not just rise from the backward glance in gratitude, it also rises from the forward glance in **hope**: Scripture: Psalm 33:18, 20

[Did You Feel the Mountains]

And sometimes, we can only respond with ***stunned silence***

Scripture : “The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.” Hab. 2:20

[Silence for a minute]

Out of silence rises a sense of ***awe*** and reverence and wonder at the sheer magnitude of God: “Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!” Ps. 33:8

[Let My Words Be Few]

Beyond this there is no quest. Words fail. We call it pleasure, joy, ***delight***. But these are weak pointers to the unspeakable experience: “One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I see after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple” Ps 27:4.

[Better is One Day – 2nd verse]

In ***conclusion***, this again comes from the ***Covenant Book of Worship***:

“Worship should be reverent, festive, and beautiful. Reverent because God is present and human beings should always stand in awe before the High and Holy One. Festive because the High and Holy One loves us and has redeemed us and claimed us, and this is something to celebrate! Beautiful because the Triune God deserves the most beautiful, the most lavish gifts human beings can bring.”

Prayer for Offering: Speaking of gifts, let’s pray over the act of worship that involves our Tithes and our offerings: “Lord Jesus Christ as we kneel at the foot of your cross, help us to see and know your love for us, so that we may place at your feet all that we have and are. We bring what we have, God - our good intentions, our mixed motives, our gifts, small and large. We know they fall short of your glory and your generosity, but we offer them and we believe that you receive them through Christ. Amen.

For Closing Song: To close our service today, there is one last song that we must sing. It is a song that acknowledges the fact that life doesn’t always feel like a celebration. It is hard at times for us to muster up the emotional energy or feelings to give thanks and praise and to delight in our God. But, we take our cues from Job in the Old Testament, “At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.”

Benediction: As you leave today, may you remember God’s will for you in Christ Jesus: To rejoice always, to pray continually, and to give thanks in all circumstances; May you not quench the Spirit or treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; May you hold on to what is good and reject every kind of evil. May God himself, the God of peace sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. Amen