

“A More Biblical Sunday Morning”
1 Kings 8:1, 6, 10-11, 22-30, 41-43
Psalm 84
Ephesians 6:10-20
John 6:56-69

Do we expect to experience the reality of God’s presence in this worship service? According to the reading in 1 Kings, God’s presence is experienced in the Temple as the people come to worship, pray and seek God in all aspects of their lives. The people give “thanks for a good harvest, for deliverance from their enemies, for peace and safety and security.”¹ Often Christians go to church with the same mindset as they have when going to the grocery store. Get in and out as quickly as possible. With this approach, we miss experiencing God.

Any of us more than 25 [55] years old can probably remember where we were when we first heard of President Kennedy’s assassination in 1963. British novelist David Lodge, in the introduction to one of his books, tells where he was--in a theater watching the performance of a satirical revue he had helped write. In one sketch, a character demonstrated his nonchalance in an interview by holding a transistor radio to his ear. The actor playing the part always tuned into a real broadcast. Suddenly came the announcement that President Kennedy had been shot. The actor quickly switched it off, but it was too late. Reality had interrupted stage comedy. For many believers, worship, prayer, and Scripture are a nonchalant charade. They don’t expect anything significant to happen, but suddenly God’s reality breaks through, and they’re shocked.²

Yes, experiencing God is the point of worship. Are you with me?

We need to experience God not only in worship, but in our relationships. In this regard, Soong-Chan Rah in Bryan Loritts, editor of *Letters To A Birmingham Jail: A*

¹L. Juliana Claassens in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year B, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 248.

²Source: Brian Powley, Ipswich, England. *Leadership, Vol. 5, no. 4.*

Response To The Words And Dreams Of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. writes, “God’s intention for diversity begins with the very beginning of human history in Genesis. All of humanity is created in the image of God. We were created with the intention of reflecting unity in YHWH in the midst of diversity. Being created male and female reflects the necessity of community and human interdependence in order to fully reflect the image of God. We need each other to reflect the image of God.”³ According to the Biblical witness, all aspects of life for Christians are a spiritual experience, an encounter with God. This way, ultimate respect and dignity is demonstrated to God and others. We are to gather around Jesus and one another. And when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper that indicates our shared humanity and salvation. The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is a most powerful experience of God’s love and commitment to each one of us.

From the Old Testament, Psalter, Epistle, and Gospel Readings, we discover that experiencing God in all aspects of life is imperative for a vital Christian life. 1 Kings 8:6, 10 reads, “Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the midst of the holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim.... And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD....” Psalm 84:8-10 reads, “O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed. For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere....” Ephesians 6:10 reads, “.... be strong in the Lord and in the strength of power.” And John 6:68-69

³Soong-Chan Rah in Bryan Loritts, ed., *Letters To A Birmingham Jail: A Response To The Words And Dreams Of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 2014), 209-210.

reads, “Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.’” Each of these texts speaks to experiencing God. The glory of God filled the temple. A day in the presence of God in the Temple is better than a thousand elsewhere. God’s strength is how we face whatever comes our way. And Jesus’ words of eternal life are livable now.

In John 6:56-69, we learn that Jesus lives the words, “I am the way, the truth and the life”, the words of the Greatest Commandment, and the words of the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount and Matthew 25 in and through us. This is not just an intellectual exercise or just an understanding of the doctrine of the incarnation. To participate in the life of faith, Jesus offers himself to us as the means through which we can abide in God and God abide in us. Jesus, full of grace, truth, and mercy, abides with us. We are spiritually nourished through Jesus. Such is the experience of the Table. Every time we partake of the bread and juice, we affirm our belief that Jesus is who he says he is.⁴

Does your experience of God leave you flat, lacking? The statement by Jesus that he is the way, the truth and the life, the teachings of the Greatest Commandment, the Sermon on the Mount and Matthew 25 are to be experienced and lived.

Every year the average American eats 33 pounds of cheese and 70 pounds of sugar. On average, 11 percent of our diet comes from saturated fats. Every day we eat 8,500 milligrams of salt—that’s four whopping teaspoons of salt. In his book *Salt Sugar Fat*, Michael Moss shows that during the past two decades some of America’s largest food producers carefully studied how to “help” us crave all this junk food. For example, some of the food industries biggest names--including Campbell Soup, General Foods, Kraft, PepsiCo, and Cadbury--hired “crave

⁴In the two paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of L. Julianna Claassens, Tim Meadowcroft, Angela Dienhart Hancock, Adam J. Copeland, Charles L. Aaron Jr., Magrey R. Devega, and Barbara K. Lundblad in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year B, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 246-249, 249-250, 251-253, 254-256, 256-258, 259-261 and 261-263.

consultants” like the scientist Dr. Howard Moskowitz to help them determine our “bliss points,” the point where food companies can “optimize” our cravings. Or as another example, Frito-Lay, makers of Lay’s potato chips and the 21 varieties of Cheetos, operated a research complex near Dallas that employed nearly 500 chemists, psychologists, and technicians and spent up to \$30 million a year to find the bliss point for their junk foods. One food scientist called Cheetos “one of the most marvelously constructed foods on the planet, in terms of pure pleasure.” Cheetos has what’s called “vanishing caloric density.” In other words because it melts down quickly, your brain thinks that there’s no calories in it, and you think you can just keep eating forever. Interestingly, many of the former executives who Moss interviewed for his book avoid the foods they tried to get us to eat. Howard Moskowitz doesn’t drink Pepsi products because he claims “[soda’s] not good for your teeth.” A Frito-Lay executive admitted to Moss that he avoids most processed foods—like Cheetos. Moss concluded, “Like other former food company executives I met, [this Frito-Lay executive] overhauled his diet to avoid the very foods he once worked so hard to perfect.”⁵

Jesus does not offer us junk food. He offers us real food for our souls. Jesus gives us himself.

Ingest and digest Jesus. Experience how Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Experience the teaching of the Greatest Commandment, the Sermon on the Mount and Matthew 25. Be Jesus to someone who needs hope, peace, joy and love. Because of the value and worth of every human being, Jesus will live in you and be with you until the end of the age. Experience God. Amen.

This sermon was preached (In-Person with COVID-19 protocols and Livestream due to the Coronavirus) on Sunday, 22 August 2021 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh in the Sanctuary at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California

Copyright © 2021
Steven M. Marsh
All rights reserved.

⁵Source: Michael Moss, “The Extraordinary Science of Addictive Junk Food,” *The New York Times* (2-20-13); Nina Strohlic, “How Fast-Food Hooks Us,” *The Daily Beast* (2-25-13).