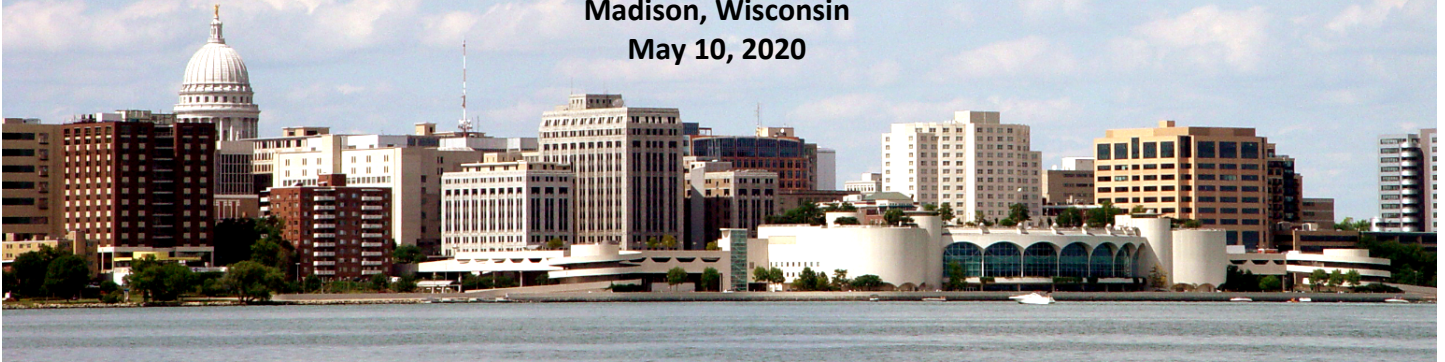


How Do We Worship at Home?

JOHN 4:24

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****COVID-19 LIVESTREAM****

Good morning! It is good to be with you this morning! After one of our studies a few weeks ago, somebody asked me about the “cards” on the woodpile behind me, and I realized that I only explained this on a Wednesday. So, for those of you who might not be with us every Wednesday, I should explain again that these are the pictures of every member of the Four Lakes congregation. Several weeks ago, I basically printed all of the pictures out of our church directory and put them on the woodpile out here. I did this as a reminder that I have the privilege of speaking to real people every week! As you might imagine, it is a little weird preaching to a tiny camera every week, all alone in my garage. Hans sent me a message a week or so ago, slightly concerned that I might need to use this firewood, with all of you still attached to it. But I assure you, I will remove the pictures before I use this wood to heat our home. It is getting warmer these days, we haven’t had to have a fire in the woodstove for a week or two now, so all of you might be safe for the time being. Hopefully we won’t be in this situation when the next heating season begins this coming October. I know it’s a bit hard to see these the way we normally have our screen laid out with the PowerPoint, so that’s why I’ve gone full screen with the camera here at the beginning. I have said for years that I try to prepare each lesson as if the church were looking over my shoulder. And now, the church (all of you) are literally looking over my shoulder.

As we begin, and as we have done since all of this began, I want to be as clear as possible about God’s plan for our salvation. And our good news this week is that a Facebook friend, Brad Harrub, was able to baptize his mother this week! Brad is also friends with the Oppermann family, they worship together at the Southern Hills congregation in Franklin, Tennessee, where Clint now serves as one of the shepherds of that congregation. And I share this as a reminder: If you are hearing this message, it is not too late to obey the gospel. Make things right with God. Jesus died for us, he was buried, he was raised up on the third day, and once we hear about it, we respond to that act of grace, we accept that gift of salvation by believing it, by turning away from sin, by confessing Jesus as the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. At that point, we are born into the family of God, and the Christian life begins. You can be baptized at our church facility with just a few friends and family, we can go to a lake or a river, or we might find a pool or a hot tub somewhere. If we can do anything to help with this in any way, if we can study together, if you have any questions, please get in touch right away.

This morning, I would like for us to study another request. It's not a formal request in the sense of somebody asking, "Will you please preach on this?", but it's more of a series of questions. About a week ago, one of our members called, and in the course of the conversation, he asked, "How can we give?" He was referring to the weekly collection. A week earlier, one of our seniors was asking, "How can we partake of the Lord's Supper during a time like this? Does it count if we partake of it alone, away from the rest of the congregation?" Someone else called to ask, "Can we use white grape juice, or does it need to be purple." Others have mentioned that it's a bit weird singing apart from each other. These are all good and valid questions and basically revolve around the question, "How do we worship at home?"

This is a great question, especially when we realize that this might continue for a while. I noticed on the news this week that churches of 50 or more in Illinois might not be able to meet together for a year or more. I noticed that churches in Kentucky were banned from meeting at all, until the supreme court overturned that, and the governor came back with some "guidelines" – including, you can meet together as a church, but you cannot sing, because singing will spread the virus. I noticed a week ago that some government officials in Tennessee decided that churches can meet, but that the "Lord's Supper" is not a "core function" of our faith. So, you can meet, but you cannot do those unnecessary bonus activities like communion. I'm pretty sure this one has already been overturned or retracted. I believe that might have been the order that demanded Bibles and songbooks be removed from the pews, since the virus can live on paper. So strange. Our own governor has churches with attendance of 50 or more opening in Phase 3 of the Badger Bounce-Back Plan, but it's a little unclear exactly what has to happen to get to Phase 3. It seems to include the downward trajectory of not only COVID-19, but of any "flu-like symptoms" as well. We've studied the plan, and it's a bit unclear, to say the least. But the point is: This thing might continue for quite some time. So, this morning, I want to do something of an overview, giving the scriptural basis and also some practical suggestions, as we answer the question, "How do we worship at home?"

However, before we even get to a summary of what we DO in worship (and specifically, how to do it on our own), I want us to keep in mind those words spoken by Jesus to the woman at the well in John 4:24, where he said that, **"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."** We don't have time to look at the background and the context here, but we do learn in this passage that worship is directed to God. There are several words translated as **"worship"** in the New Testament, but generally speaking, worship is the idea of showing reverence to someone. And in this case, the focus of our reverence is God. We don't worship angels. We don't worship idols made of rock or stone. But our reverence is directed to God.

We also learn in this passage that worship is to be done **"in spirit."** My understanding of this is that worship is to come from the heart. One author explained that to worship God "in spirit" means that we worship him "in the invisible spirit that is your true self. It is the place that only you and God know. It is the place where sin lives and forgiveness occurs, where hearts are broken and repentance takes place." And that is so true! We intend to worship. We worship from the heart. Otherwise, we are just going through the motions. We must worship **"in spirit,"** with intent, from the heart.

But in addition to being **"in spirit,"** our worship must also be **"in truth."** We know from John 17:17 that God's word is truth. True worship, then, must be done according to the word of God. We are to honor God in the way that he has asked to be honored. It is important, then, to worship God **"in truth,"** according to his word; not just doing whatever we feel like doing, but we honor God as he has asked to be honored. Worship, then, is an act of reverence directed toward God, in spirit and in truth.

So, with this in mind, let's be thinking about some of what we do in worship, and as we do, let's be thinking about how we do these things at home.

I. We start this morning with THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE, with THE PREACHING OF GOD'S WORD.

We know that the word of God is powerful. Starting in 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul writes to the young preacher Timothy and says, ***"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."*** Because of this, he goes on to say, ***"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."*** The word of God, then, is to be preached. It is to be read and explained publicly. We are to hear the word, we are to obey the word, and then we are to share it. This is why we put an emphasis on the preaching of God's word whenever we come together for worship today, and this is why we are doing the best we can to continue this emphasis online and over the phone, even when we are not able to be together. It is critically important that we take time out of our week to listen to the word of God.

As we do this, I would make just a few practical suggestions to make this more effective, to get more out of it, and to give us some resources. First, I want to make sure that those of us joining in on YouTube know about the closed captions. When you're in YouTube on a computer, go to the bottom right-hand corner and find a little box that says "CC," referring to "closed captions." That, I believe, will turn it on. You might also be able to do this by going to the settings (usually a little icon that looks like a gear, also located in the bottom right-hand corner of the video itself). When you click on the gear, you should notice that one of the options is "subtitles" or "CC" (referring to closed captioning). And not only can you turn that on, but you should also be able to make all kinds of adjustments to the font, and the size, and the background. On a phone, I think you go to the three little dots, and that brings up the menu. If you need help, just find an 8-year old, and they will get that all squared away for you! When you turn on the subtitles, you might notice that it is not perfect. It will make some mistakes, but it is usually very, very good and quite helpful. So, in terms of practical help with hearing the word of God preached, I do want to make sure that all of us know about the captions. It is a valuable tool. It's there, but we might need to turn it on.

One thing we also don't want to overlook would be classes for children, especially for little children. One of my favorites comes from the Estes Church of Christ down near Freed-Hardeman in Tennessee. They have an on-line class for 2-3 year olds, taught by Dr. Kevin Moore, and it is good! It's not often we have a Bible class for 2-3 year olds, taught by an elder, who is also a Bible professor with a doctorate! Brother Moore is a former missionary to New Zealand. You can find his class by going to the Estes Church of Christ Facebook page.

Beyond this, I would also encourage all of us to get some bonus teaching throughout the week. We've mentioned PTP 365 a few times over the past few weeks. Polishing the Pulpit is a program that a number of us have been to through the years. They have some solid Bible teaching, and right now they are offering online access for free. They've had a nightly gospel meeting going on for several weeks now. Every Sunday they have singing, and a sermon, and some thoughts on the Lord's Supper. I would encourage you to sign up, and also to follow their page on Facebook – Polishing the Pulpit.

We might also want some bonus teaching from other places. There are so many choices, so I would suggest going to somebody you already know. Go to the congregation where you grew up. Chances are, they are offering

online studies right now. Go to a preacher you know. One of my favorites is Jason Haygood at the Yorba Linda Church of Christ out in California. Jason grew up in Whitewater, he preached in Janesville for a bit, and now he's doing a great work out in California – Jason Haygood in Yorba Linda, California.

I have also rediscovered Brett Rutherford's website in Devonport, Tasmania, at the Mersey Bluff Church of Christ. Brett preached here in Madison from 1997 to 2000, and he has some very good lessons online as well. Again, there is much that is false out there on the Internet, especially in the realm of spiritual things, but there are some very good resources as well. And it's often very nice to see a familiar face. So, first of all, even when we are at home, we can hear the word preached – not just locally (to keep us connected here at Four Lakes), but also globally (with some very good resources).

II. Secondly, we can obviously also PRAY at home.

There are dozens of scriptures we could use here, but I'm using James 5:16, because it specifically refers to praying for ***"one another."*** Notice, please, the words of James in James 5:16, where he says, ***"Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."*** Obviously, we pray during our worship assemblies, but we can also pray at home alone. Prayer is an act of worship. And in terms of practical help, I would make two suggestions.

First of all, pray the bulletin. Here at the Four Lakes congregation, we send out the bulletin by email every Saturday afternoon. Print it out or open it on your phone or computer, and pray the bulletin. For those without internet access, I mail these out every Monday morning. But however you get the bulletin, read it, and on the front, pray for our elders and deacons. Pray for the preacher. We have a picture of the state capitol building on the front. Take that as a reminder to pray for those in positions of authority. On the backside of our weekly bulletin, we have a list of "prayer concerns," divided up into several categories – spiritual concerns, and general concerns, and health concerns, and several of those we love who are battling cancer. Pray through those names. If you see something that needs to be updated, give me a call or send a message. Pray for Shults-Lewis Child and Family Services (a Christian children's home); we have their logo on the back. Pray for the Bible Correspondence Course program. Pray for any upcoming events.

And then a second suggestion: Pray through our church directory. For those without internet access, I mailed these out about two weeks ago. For those of us who are online, make sure you have an account on our church website, go there to the "members" section, go down to "directory," and then you have some options – search, browse, sort, or even download it as a PDF (with or without the pictures). And then pray through the directory, name by name. Pray for health and family concerns that we know about, be general, be specific, but pray. God knows. Prayer is an act of worship we can very easily do at home.

III. The third act of worship we can do at home is SINGING.

Obviously, there are some huge benefits to singing TOGETHER. According to Colossians 3:16, by singing, we are ***"teaching and admonishing one another."*** But at the same time, we can also sing alone or in small groups or with our families. Notice James 5:13, where James says, ***"Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises."*** There's not necessarily a "one another" component in this passage. It is possible to sing alone from time to time. And then we also have Acts 16:25, where Paul and Silas are in prison, and the Bible says, ***"But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to***

God, and the prisoners were listening to them.” As someone has suggested, “We are the spiritual descendants of those who sang songs at midnight. Very true!

For a few practical suggestions, I would suggest getting a songbook. We normally use the book Praise for the Lord, edited by John Wiegand. I’ve met John a time or two. He’s actually an attorney in San Francisco – a Christian attorney in San Francisco. Seems like a nice guy. This book is around \$16 on Amazon. If you would like one of our Beaver Creek Bible Camp books, let me know, and I will try to mail you a copy.

A year or so ago, I discovered a good app aimed at youth ministers, who often need songs in strange places – at lock-ins or Bible camps, for example. This is the “Ministry League” app, created by members of the Lord’s church. They have a rather large collection of songs – not the music, just the words – but if everybody in your family downloads the free app, you can all go to the same song and sing together. In our family, I have quite a few songs on my laptop. I will text those to everybody in my family so we can sing together. A similar concept.

I would also suggest The Paperless Hymnal, also compiled by a member of the Lord’s church. They offer roughly 70 songs completely free on their website. These are not just scanned in, but they have completely reformatted these songs for the purpose of using them during worship. We’ve tried a few of these at Four Lakes, and the greatest praise for these came from one of our seniors sitting on the back row. He was amazed that he could read the words and the notes clearly and that his head wasn’t buried in his book. We can purchase sets of these or even individual songs as a congregation, but these 70 songs are free to use to see how we like it. I see no problem at all with using these at home.

And finally, as to singing, especially if you are interested in learning some new songs, I would suggest going to YouTube and doing a search for a song title, but include “church of Christ” in quotes in your search. Often, you will be able to find a cappella singing, even congregational singing, not accompanied by instrumental music. By the way, I did this earlier today, and the first result came from the “Corona Church of Christ,” quite the unfortunate name for a congregation during a pandemic. But they had a good a cappella version of Ancient Words.

IV. So, we can study, and pray, and sing at home – what about GIVING?

I feel like we’ve been pretty good at getting this information out there, but this is the question I got about a week ago, “How do we give?” So, we need to review at least a bit. By way of a scriptural basis for this, we know from 2 Corinthians 9:7 that, **“Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”** We give to support the preaching of the gospel, we give to help provide for our members in need, and we give to support the work of the congregation in general. Last month, we sent out and graded over 1200 Bible correspondence courses. That takes postage, and paper, and a contract with Gordon Flesch to keep our copy machine from bursting into flames. That takes money. And thankfully, giving cheerfully is absolutely something we can do from home on a weekly basis. If you ever forget what options we have available, go to the bottom of the last paragraph on the second page of our bulletin. It is all there.

First of all, to give by check (old fashioned way), just send a check to the church’s post office box at the main post office on Milwaukee Street. Our treasurer checks that box every week (either on Friday or Saturday), and he then combines those checks together to make a deposit. We have the address on the screen here – P.O. Box 8637, Madison, Wisconsin 53708.

Secondly, as one of our members discovered a few years ago, it is also possible to have your bank automatically mail a check every week. That's what we have now done in our family, and we love it. For us, at least, it is completely free through UW Credit Union. We went to the app, found something called "Web Pay" (it might be called something else with your bank), we entered the church's address, and set up a recurring payment on a weekly basis. Every Monday, they put a check in the mail, and it gets to our treasurer by Friday. And we plan on leaving this in place even after we get back together. I don't know about you, but the check to church is one of the few actual checks we write anymore. So, our plan is to continue this. It's regular, it doesn't cost anything (other than the contribution itself), and if we go out of town, we keep on giving. If you find that your bank charges for this service, get a new bank! Some credit cards might do something similar, and then the fee might actually end up being basically covered by getting rewards of some kind on your contribution. That might at least be a possibility.

And then the third option is online giving. One of our members asked about this maybe a year ago, and we researched it then. But there is a cost to it, so we held off. Now, though, we see a value to it. As the result of extensive research, we landed on tithe.ly. They have an app, but you can also get to it on our website under the "Get In Touch" button, and then "Giving" on the drop-down menu. You set up an account and then set it up on a one-time or recurring basis. Most credit and debit cards require a fee of around 2.9% plus a charge of \$.30 per transaction. American Express is more, but you can set up a direct deposit through tithe.ly for less. They also give the option for those of us who are giving covering the fee instead of passing it along to the church. You know I am not a numbers person, but for example, if I were to give \$100, there's a button that will push the amount to \$103.20 (the 1% + the \$.30). Or, I could leave it at \$100 even for me, but the church only gets \$96.80. Then, when this goes through, it goes to the church's checking account, and our treasurer adds that amount to the weekly collection.

So, these are our three options at this point: Mailing a check the old-fashioned way, setting it up with your bank to mail a check automatically, or heading online and doing it through tithe.ly. If you have any questions, please get in touch.

V. All of us brings us to the LORD'S SUPPER.

In a nutshell, the Lord's Supper is summarized for us by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26,

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

The elements here are unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine. In terms of the bread, it's one of the easiest things to make – flour, oil, water, and salt. I'm putting three recipes up here. You can find plenty online. One is from my grandmother. This one is for you and 500 of your closest friends. The one from Ruth Conrad is on the right. This is what we are familiar with here at Four Lakes. We are spoiled with awesome communion bread. I don't know how many of us realize this. I like the one on the lower left for a small batch. Or, if you cannot bake at all, go to the store and get the matzo crackers. I believe most Triscuits are unleavened, made of nothing more than wheat, oil, and salt. All we need is unleavened bread.

As to the fruit of the vine, that's just a fancy way of saying "grape juice." And yes, I believe white grape juice is valid. It is **"the fruit of the vine."** It represents the Lord's blood. I would encourage you to check the ingredients. Make sure it's not "grape cocktail" or "grape Kool-Aid," but make sure it's actually GRAPE JUICE. Some so-called "grape juice" is actually a whole lot of apple juice. Apples are apparently a bit cheaper than grapes. We get our grape juice from Aldi, "100% Juice, Made with Concord Grapes." At our house, we stand around the island in the kitchen, we read a passage together, we pray for and partake of the bread, and then we pray for and partake of the juice, before singing a song together. Worship that's pleasing to God is very simple.

As for those of you partaking alone, I would encourage you to think of 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 where Paul says, ***"Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread."*** As I understand it, the **"one body"** (in verse 17) refers to the Lord's church worldwide. Personally, I like to imagine the sun coming up in Samoa, where God's people sing, and pray, and study, and give, and partake of the Supper first, then as the earth rotates, the memorial meal is shared by those in Japan, and New Zealand, and Australia, and China, and Russia, and India, and Europe, and Africa, then here in North and South America, Alaska, Hawaii, and finally, back to American Samoa. The **"one body"** celebrates the supper worldwide over a 24-hour period. What a blessing! What unity! So, whether we partake with our local congregation or alone, all of us are a part of the **"one body,"** and the memorial supper is equally valid; we share in the body and blood of the Lord, and when we do, we also share with each other, regardless of how far apart we might be.

Conclusion:

This morning, then, we've looked at what it means to worship in spirit and in truth at home. We are obviously looking forward to being back together, but in the meantime, we keep on worshipping – on our own or with our families. As we close, let's go to God in prayer,

Our Father in Heaven,

You alone are worthy of all worship and praise. You are the great and awesome God, you are Spirit, and so we come to you today with our songs and prayers, with our commitment to learn more about you through your words; we come to you with our offerings, and we come to you today to gather around the table as your people. Thank you for allowing us to approach you in this way. We pray that whether we are alone or with our families, that our worship today is being carried out in spirit and in truth.

We continue to pray for your will to be done in all things. Our prayer is that this pandemic will come to a quick and sudden end. In the meantime, we ask that you bless those who are working so hard to keep us well. Bless them for the sacrifices they continue to make. Bless those who keep us safe in other ways. We pray for continued blessings on our elderly, especially for the members of our congregation. We pray that they might be an encouragement to each other and to the rest of us. Bless our congregation. We ask that you will continue to bless us with the wisdom and resources to help others in your name.

We are thankful for the forgiveness of sins that we have through your Son. Thank you for the promises of Jesus. We come to you today in his name, with his permission, by his authority. Lord, come quickly. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com