



Celebration Worship Sermon Thoughts

The *God's People Gather* worship service is a celebration of the blessings we receive when we gather as a family of believers. While others could be included, the service focuses on four blessings in particular: The blessing of worshiping in the house of God, the blessing of Christian community, the blessing of serving one another and alongside one another, and the blessing of the Lord's Supper.

The preacher can choose to share God's message with his people in either of two ways:

1. A traditional sermon using the four lessons as the basis for his message, touching on all four of the blessings or
2. Four sermonettes—each focusing on one of the four lessons

The sermon thoughts here provided are intended to assist the preacher in preparing his message or messages and, it is hoped, will be a blessing whichever way he decides to proclaim God's truth.

Introduction

The introduction would be a good place to speak about what God's people have been through since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the sermon will focus on the four blessings of worship in God's house, community, service, and the Lord's Supper, it may be wise to speak about the hardship we all experienced when we were unable to enjoy these blessings.

He might say, for example, *"Wasn't it strange when we suddenly couldn't gather here to worship alongside our brothers and sisters in Christ? It all happened so fast! Just like that <snap!> we couldn't come here. At first, it was just so strange. Then, after a few weeks, perhaps you found yourself longing more and more to be here together.*

"But now we are back! Praise the Lord, he has brought us back to this place—back to his house with his people to hear his word and receive his sacrament.

“And so, we are celebrating, as is only fitting. So, let’s take a few minutes to listen as God’s Word reminds us of some of the blessings we receive when we gather in this place.”

The Blessing of Corporate Worship

“The first blessing is what we are doing right now—worshiping together in God’s house. It’s so easy, isn’t it, to take worship for granted? When you have the privilege of worshiping together every week it is so easy to assume that will always be the case and to overlook what an awesome privilege it is.

“But ask our military personal when they are overseas for months at a time how much they miss going to church. Ask Christians in countries that outlaw public worship how much they wish they could go to church. Ask one of our homebound members how much they wish they were able to join us here. Ask one of us when the lockdowns happened how much we missed being here.

“The truth is, we have all taken worship for granted at times in our lives. We have all allowed far less important things to become far more important than they should.

“But that is why it is so wonderful to be back. Because here we hear God’s appointed representative announce his forgiveness for the sake of our Savior, Jesus. Here we are reminded of God’s love and strength and promises. Here we stand shoulder to shoulder with our sisters and brothers confessing, praying, and praising. Isn’t it great to be back?

King David certainly thought it was wonderful to be together with God’s people in God’s house. So much so, in fact, that he wrote this in the twenty-seventh Psalm:

*One thing I ask from the Lord,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord
and to seek him in his temple. (Psalm 27:4)*

The Blessing of Christian Community

“Not only is it a blessing to be here to experience worship together, but what a blessing to experience each other together!”

“It is terribly important for Christians to be around other Christians. The blessings of being here go beyond the worship service, don’t they? We are also blessed by the bookends before worship and after worship when we shake hands and hug and see each other’s smiles, when we

share what's happening in our lives and listen to what is happening in the lives of our brothers and sisters.

"How often haven't you gone home after attending church and thought about the conversation you had with someone before or after worship?"

'Wow, Sarah is really going through a rough time. I'm going to need to keep her in my prayers this week. Maybe I'll give her a call in a couple of days to see how she's doing.'

'I'm so glad I was able to talk to Bill this morning. He's such a good listener. It just felt good to get everything out there and share it with someone.'

'I had no idea Alice was so lonely. She would never say it, of course. But I could tell from the way she was talking that she struggles. I'm going to have her over for lunch this week.'

"Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the writer of the book of Hebrews knew how important it is for Christians to experience community. Here is what he wrote in the tenth chapter of his book:

²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:23-25)

The Blessing of Christian Service

"It's no wonder our God wants us to gather together as his people. When we do, he blesses us with the joy of worshiping with one another as well as the opportunity to experience Christian community.

"But that's not all! When we gather as God's Church, we also have the privilege of serving one another and serving alongside one another.

"Sadly, we sometimes think only of ourselves when we think about coming to church. We wonder, 'What's in it for me?' as if we are simply consumers coming to be served a product of some sort.

"Certainly, we are blessed when we gather here. We've just talked about two blessings in particular. But that is not the only reason God wants us to gather. He also knows that this is a place where we have nearly endless opportunities to serve our fellow believers.

"I think of those of you who usher, take care of our altar area, count the offerings every week, keep our building clean, sing in the choir, cook a casserole for a luncheon, fold our service

folders, mow the lawn, teach Sunday School and on and on and on. We weren't able to do these acts of service for a while. Perhaps it has made us realize what a privilege it is. (Here the preacher will want to use applications fitting for his setting.)

"Not only are we able to serve one another when we gather here, but we are able to serve alongside one another. There are simply things we cannot do on our own but that we can do together. We can serve on a committee, coach a team, or sing in a choir... (Once again, the preacher will want to use applications fitting for his setting.)

"God's people have always experienced the blessing of serving in his Church. Listen to this lovely description of the Christians in Jerusalem in Acts, chapter 4:

³²All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

³⁶Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), ³⁷sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

The Blessing of the Lord's Supper

"There is one more blessing of gathering here that we do not want to overlook—the blessing of receiving the Lord's Supper.

"Do you remember what Jesus said about his supper the night he instituted it? He said, "Take and eat; this is my body." "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Here the preacher may wish to pause to allow the words sink in...

"This...is...my...body. This...is...my...blood." Think of what it is you are receiving in this sacrament. Brothers and sisters, you come into contact with the body and blood of God himself! You will never be closer to God in this life than when you receive this Holy Supper.

"And, with that body and blood, what did Jesus say we receive? The forgiveness of our sins. Brothers and sisters, if we ever fail to desire the Lord's Supper, we fail to realize the seriousness of our sins. Because when we do realize how numerous and serious our sins are, we want nothing more than to be here to receive this pledge of God's forgiveness. Not desiring this

would be like a man dying of thirst not wanting a cup of cold water. It would make no sense. Listen to St. Matthew's account of the institution of the Lord's Supper:

²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

²⁷ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ This is my blood of the^[a] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:26-28)

"Thank God we can be here once again. I mean it. Spend some time in prayer this week thanking him for the blessings we receive when we are here. We can't know all of the ways God might use the COVID-19 pandemic for good. But perhaps it has made us appreciate more than before the blessings we receive when God's people gather."