

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Rector

Scripture: Various

"The Seven Aims of Worship" (part 1)

SOME TIME AWAY

As many of you know I was away for several weeks. First in June to the Los Angeles area in California for a Provincial Council meeting for the ACNA. I took my family with me and we spent a few extra days sightseeing. We had the opportunity to meet Franklin Graham who was there for one of his evangelistic festivals (I will share more about this next week).

Then I was back for a week and before I began my extended vacation beginning July 3rd. During this time I had some extra down time. Now I usually try to keep up with what is going on in the world, but it seemed like there was quite a bit of unusual news this past month. Bizarre, tragic, and evil. Let me just highlight briefly some of these locally, nationally, and worldwide. It seemed to begin with our state legislature and governor approving same sex "marriage." This was the sad result of our governor putting pressure on a number of State Senators, and as a result we had several flip-flop politicians who enabled gay marriage became legal in the state to great fanfare in the media and the homosexual community. Gay marriage is a misnomer by the way as marriage cannot between two people of the same sex. There is no such thing. Never has been, never will. You can call it marriage but it isn't. Why? The Bible is very clear - marriage is between a man and woman. God created us male and female and he instituted marriage. But there was never an option for people of the same sex until the last twenty years. But that is for another sermon.

A few days later we got the terrible news that double amputee army sergeant James Hackemer fell out of his roller coaster car at Darien Lake and plunged to his death. Then there was the girl killed in Amherst by a Buffalo physician in a hit and run accident. A local Tonawanda woman and her pet died in a house fire just few blocks from church on Parkhurst. Another Kenmore man died in a house fire less than ten days later. Next, an 18 year old young man from Lockport drowned while fishing after he dropped his fishing pole and tried to retrieve it. It was dark and he didn't realize that the water level dropped suddenly so he drowned. Then the tour bus accident. A Niagara County sheriff's deputy loses his two legs in a guardrail crash. A house blew up in the Town of Niagara and just last week and elderly couple right here in the Town of Tonawanda both died because of the heat wave.

Right at the end of my vacation I heard the terrible news of the massacre in Norway which is also an indictment on that nation's arrogant naiveté. They're living in a fantasy world. Only one helicopter with pilots away on summer vacation, and 90 minutes to get to a place less than 30 miles from the capital. Are you kidding? A third world country would have done better.

Finally, as I speak, our nation's government seems incapable of dealing with our ever-increasing national debt and imploding economy. Now if I didn't know better, my vacation could have been pretty depressing. But I do know better. I know who is the One who brings order out of the chaos, who brings victory out of defeat, who brings life from death - the Lord Jesus Christ, and that my friends is why I came back to be with you.

Now if we are going to experience the order, the purpose, the direction, the victory and life that God desires for us then we need to understand the purpose of worship. Last month, I had spent some time on Anglican Worship answering the question why we do what we do. But what I want to talk about this week and next are the aims of worship. What is it that we are actually doing on Sunday and how what we do in worship is supposed to be the model for how we are to live our lives every day. Too often, we can get into the mindset that Sunday worship is the culmination of the week or worse that it is just something we do here and there - a token acknowledgment that we believe in God. But the whole service is geared to provide us with the foundation and springboard for how we are to live the rest of the week. We will see how as we look at the Word of God and find seven aims of Christian worship. We will talk about the first four today and the final three next week. And by the way, they all begin with the letter "L" and they are all verbs.

LOOK TO JESUS

Let's look at the first aim. Please turn with me to **John 3:16**.

16*"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17**"For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 18**"He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

We are all familiar with these verses. However, sometimes it is what Jesus said in the verses before that is overlooked. Jesus said, *"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life."*

Why the analogy to the serpent and the pole that Moses lifted up in the wilderness? In order to understand the comparison we need to recall an event that happened some 1500 years earlier.

We read from **Numbers 21:4-9**: *Then they set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient because of the journey. 5**The people spoke against God and Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food." 6**The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. 7**So the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us." And Moses interceded for the people. 8**Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live." 9**And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on*

the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived.

After God had given His people victory they fell into outright blasphemy spurning the very food of God. In other words, they were rejecting God's grace and goodness. As a result, they fell under judgment. God sent poisonous snakes into their camp, killing many. The people realized then their sin and sought forgiveness. God had compassion on them and then commanded Moses to make a large bronze serpent and put it on a pole. He was to raise it up and anyone who looked to the pole would be spared God's judgment.

Now that must have sounded like an odd request as the crafting of a bronze serpent would remind the people of graven images and idols, and spiritual evil as the serpent had been the disguise of Satan. And yet, God not only has Moses make the serpent, all have the choice to obey. And if they look to the serpent they are healed.

The analogy is clear. Anyone who *looks to* Jesus has the opportunity for new life and salvation. Jesus became a curse that we might be free from the curse! God used death to destroy death. But it is only because of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the first aim of worship is that we are to LOOK to Jesus Christ. We need to keep our eyes on Him and no one or anything else. In our worship, notice how we have the cross, the altar, and the sanctuary. During our worship, all our attention is to be directed to this area of the church. Our focus is to be forward and on the cross and the altar as well as what the clergy and lay readers are doing. It is a reminder that we are to always keep our focus on Jesus Christ during the rest of the week. And when you are focused on someone or something, nothing else has your attention, does it? And so are you looking to Christ when we are not in Church? Or are you looking to your circumstances, your feelings, other people, ourselves?

LISTEN TO JESUS

The second aim follows closely after the first. They go hand in hand. Please turn with me now to **Matthew 7:21-27**. Jesus had just given His famous Sermon on the Mount and He closes with these words:

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’ “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. “And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. “Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. “The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”

Notice how Jesus says anyone who hears my words and does them is the wise person. What is Jesus talking about? Listening to Him. Not merely hearing but listening. What's the difference? A listener follows through. A teacher or a parent will compliment the child who is a good listener. Why?

They follow through, they obey. How many times have we heard as a child or said as a parent, "Are you listening to me?" when something doesn't get down that we have been told to do?

So after looking to Jesus we are to listen to Jesus and this means taking to heart what He has said and taught. And that means a willingness to obey. In our worship, we hear the Word of God read, we hear it preached and we hear it reaffirmed during the Holy Communion. Are we taking it to heart? Are we listening? Are we listening in such a way that we're committed to putting it into action when we leave?

LEARN FROM JESUS

Now if we are looking to Jesus and listening to Jesus, something we invariably happen. We will be learning from Jesus. That is the goal of looking and listening isn't it? To learn from the Lord. He is our model, He is our example.

Jesus said in **Mt. 11:28-30**: *Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."*

That is another aim of worship - to learn from Christ. To learn how to be like Him. It is no different in the classroom. If a student is to learn the material in class then they have to look at the teacher, they have to listen to what is taught and practice doing it, and then they learn.

So you can see the process to become like Jesus. And you can see how that is integrated in the worship service but also in the life of the Church. We have various ministries inside and outside the church that people can get involved in but it is also and even more importantly, done so that we can reflect what we learn in the family. But it isn't going to happen just one hour on Sunday. We need to be looking to Jesus, listening to Jesus and learning from Jesus everyday of the week.

Learn to do what, you may ask? This leads us to the fourth aim of worship.

LOVE JESUS

Jesus came to teach us how to love. We are to love Jesus and Jesus said if we love him we will love each other and we will love our neighbor, the stranger and even our enemies. So we if we are looking to Jesus, listening to Jesus, learning from Jesus then we will bear learning how to love Jesus. And what is the first act of love? Repentance. Repentance is turning from self and back to God. And before I can really love others I have to turn away from self because true love is self-less. Do you see how everything relates?

Jesus said on the night before He died, *"Just as I have loved you, so you must love one another."* And He washed their feet to demonstrate what kind of love He was talking about. It is self-less, serving and forgiving. It is why we have the peace of the LORD after confession and the recalling of Christ's death on the cross which is God's ultimate demonstration of love for us.

And so that is what we are learning to do - in the church, in the family, in the community, in the world. Being witnesses of Christ's love to a sinful and dying world.

Now next week we will finish by looking at the final three aims of Christian worship.

But before I close, I would like to come back to almost where I began with story of double amputee James Hackemer. When I first heard about the tragedy I thought to myself, what a terrible series of events. and I certainly wondered why? It was only a few days later that I learned that he was a believer and that he had a spiritual experience after his severe wounds. In fact, that experience made it to the front page of the *Buffalo News* on Friday July 15. The article mentions his near-death experience and how his changed as a result. The following is an excerpt from that article:

"John Hackemer told how he had walked into his brother's hospital room in Boston and noticed that James appeared to be in extreme distress. "What's wrong, James?" he asked. "I remember what happened to me after they medevaced me. I died and was transported to a place that no one would ever want to go," James said.

John Hackemer sought specifics.

"To which he [James] replied in an eerily convincing tone, 'I saw hell.' James then broke into sobs as he went on with the story."

The recovering veteran explained that while he was unconscious, he had felt like he was being transported into a volcano when a voice said to him, "Hang on, you'll like this ride."

As he descended, James Hackemer said, he felt no sense of fear and had lost all sense of time. "I could see people down there that were suffering nonstop. I couldn't hear them, but I could see them. They were unable to escape. That is when I became aware of the situation and began attempts to escape, to no avail.

...

"People in Army uniforms came and rescued me. The Army guys were the ones in the chopper that brought me back to life."

It was at that point, Hackemer told his brother, that his eyes gazed upon heaven. "I went into a bright room. ... It was really bright and full of tons of food. The people in there were very nice, and they gave me food and water and told me to rest. They assured me that I was safe now. After that, I woke up here in Boston not afraid of what had happened to me."

Sensing that there might be skeptics, James Hackemer ended his recollections on a humble note. "If you do not believe my story, that is fine, but know this -- there is a greater power, and there is a battle between good and evil, and I've seen both sides of it, and thank God I am where I am at today, just happy to be alive."

Waugh, the pastor of Victory Tabernacle in Cattaraugus, was invited to preach at the service by the Rev. Randy Pratt, pastor of the Gowanda church, who who lives across the road from the Hackemer family.

Pratt nearly broke down when he looked toward Hackemer's flag-covered coffin topped with a New York Yankees hat, sunglasses and a war portrait of James during his first tour in Iraq in the midst of a sandstorm.

Describing Hackemer as a "kid brother," whom he has known since 1985, Pratt recalled younger, happier and perhaps wilder times when he would help his friend home from parties or attend family bonfires at the Hackemer home.

But on the searing question of why something so terrible could happen to a man who had already suffered so much, the preacher said, "We could debate this for hours, but you need to know there are threads of mercy with James dying [in the helicopter and later on the operating table] and getting a second chance."

It was during that second chance, Pratt said, that the double amputee ministered to others with his examples of courage and faith.

Now his story has the potential to touch millions of other lives, he said.

"I truly believe James Hackemer is our man of steel," he said. "James would say, 'He needs Jesus' or 'You need Jesus.' We need Jesus."

My friends that sums it up. That is why we need to look to Jesus, listen to Jesus, learn from Jesus, and love Jesus. It is the only way that leads to life. In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, AMEN!