

2024 Youth Retreat

“Why we worship” is the theme of the South Idaho Youth Retreat. And it’s a question I agree is worth exploring.

When we think of worship, I wonder if we often think of a feeling, or perhaps song, and maybe we first go to “style of song” in our age.

But worship in the bible is not about feelings, nor just about style: it is about posture.

Worship in Greek and Hebrew, means to bow down, or prostrate yourself. It is posture. It’s an act of humility, an act of submission – both words we don’t much like. But we know it’s true. When the enemy king, who lost the battle is dragged before the victorious king he is tossed at his feet on the ground. The victorious King can kill him, can humiliate him, can do whatever he wants to him. He has the power, the other does not.

And so we worship because we recognize there is this One with great power, with great victory.

And we, on our own, can’t stand in that presence. So we bow.

And if our pride is pushing back at us now. If our pride is saying, “well he must be a mean God or a narcissist, I don’t want to bow to him!” I think there are two responses to this – two realities to consider.

The first is, well, the losing king probably doesn’t much want to bow down to the winning king either. But he has to, because he lost. And so, by all means, we can try to rebel and rise up against God, to try and place ourselves or something else over him. But which of those things or which of us are good enough, strong enough, or powerful enough to not only defeat Him who is the maker of the stars, the One who upholds every electron and quark in existence, who is more

devastatingly strong than the strongest ocean current or a black hole - no let's not even talk about defeating him, the Creator, because we can't even defeat our frailty, our sin and evil, let alone death. And so regardless of how someone might feel, that does not change the fact that "Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." That WILL happen. Because he IS the victorious King and mighty God. And so one of the reasons we worship is because we, nor anything else in all creation, when we see God face to face, will do anything else.

But I mentioned a second reality. A second point to consider when it comes to kneeling down, worshiping, before God – and this reality is that, God, is actually: good!

We can fall to our knees before the King of kings and the Maker of time and space, and say we are so unworthy, we are failures, we do have evil in us, and we can't win. (Which we did during confession). And the King of kings can do whatever he wants to you, he can chop your head off, he can wipe you from existence, he can banish you to hell – Or... Or... he can pardon you (as he did in the absolution). He can look at the enemy king and raise him up, offer him the goblet of peace (communion), and let him go free (and so we end services with a benediction, a good word of peace). But even more, he can put a crown on that enemy king's head and let him reign in his kingdom! (and so the waters of baptism wash over your head and make you God's child). He can do all this if he wants – why not? Who will stop him? He is the victorious king!

And so Christians, throughout time, have bent the knee before the Lord, they have bowed their heads – why? Because there is no one stronger, and no one better to put your life into their hands.

The Victorious King's hands are scarred. Scarred because he is not a King that sits in an ivory tower while his servants go to and fro and fight his battles for him. No. That's not God, not our King.

Our King leaves his throne, comes into the darkness of this broken world with depression and fear and pain. And he experiences it. He succumbs to it. And he hung on the cross and his enemies laughed. They had “won.” This “king” was nothing but a failure with no army and his followers scared and betraying and denying him. He was bent low under a cross he couldn’t even carry, whipped and beaten. And then he was dead. A lifeless, powerless, decaying, clump. Put it in the tomb.

But the tomb couldn’t hold him, death couldn’t hold him, this is our victorious King! There is a lot out in that world that is attractive, engaging, entertaining, fun – and that’s ok – but please, please, which of them conquer the grave? Why bow the knee to anything else? So hear again of the King who died to pardon you, so that when you do come and worship, or see him face to face and bend the knee, you will hear, “Fear not, arise, you are forgiven, you are my child, and an heir of the kingdom! Well done good and faithful servant.”

Yes even us, with our rebellion and doubts and fears and sins, come to the One who is strong, but so merciful. Who poured out his blood once and for all to wash you clean that you may be his forever.

Until that day, I admit, It may be hard to see or say that the King, God, is good all the time. We see the wars, we see the brokenness, we feel the depression, the anxiety. The battle is hard at times, the fears real, “why keep fighting?” It doesn’t seem like we are winning a whole lot at times. We struggle with the same sins, we get sick, death is out there so visible! Why not just give up like that widow in our Old Testament reading wanted to?”

Ah, but remember who we worship, who we bend the knee to, who we fight for and, more importantly, who fights for us. Jesus. This is our victorious king who, after battle, will walk the

battlefield, and he, an no other, is the one who will come to each fallen and slain soldier, and raise them up again.

Who would you rather serve?

And so we worship, we bow the head and bend the knee to God and the Lamb because He is strong and he is good. That's WHY we worship. And worship then, revolves around God's Word, His Gifts, and his promises that continually remind us of the pardon he has given us, that we might be his and share in his victory forever. Amen.