

Romans 7
~~10:1-11~~

Worship and Prayer

October 9, 1994

Sometimes I feel like there is a whole world out there going to hell, and we are in here playing church.

Sometimes it feels like we are children, acting out a little game, waiting for the time when we grow up to live in the real world.

In the face of problems that are so great out there, we choose to center our attention on hymns to sing, and prayers to pray, and call it worshipping God.

And then we can't even do that well.

We get distracted. The child in the row in front of us waves and we forget God for a moment. A word reminds me of what I forgot to do at home, or what I said last night or this morning and suddenly I am far away. I sing a whole hymn and never think a single word I've sung. My mind is on the sound of the one who is singing behind me, or on the pace of the hymn that I think too fast or too slow, or on what I hate about this hymn.

We get impatient, ready to be done with all this standing and sitting and waiting and to get on to the rest of the day. I'm too hot, too cold, sleepy from a short night's rest. Hungry because I rushed off this morning with nothing to eat.

I get disgusted. Someone is showing off, hogging the center stage, thinking they are so important.

And God who knows the thoughts of every heart must be shaking his head. I gave my Son for this?

Yes, I wonder about what we call worship.

But then I find out that you bring the world in here with you.

You bring the heartache that you feel over your parents shouting at each other here, to God, asking for peace in your home.

You bring the cousin who is dying of cancer here, into the worship of God's people and as you worship you pray for him to God.

You bring the sadness you feel over the words that you spoke this last week, words that hurt another.

You bring the powerlessness you feel over hungry children who enter your home and heart through pictures on the evening news.

You come here hungry for God, desperate for the forgiveness and love that is yours in Jesus Christ.

You come here to sing and pray your thanks, to join your song to the song of all God's people in every place and of every age.

So at the very moment I may be only playing church, you are worshipping God, and in the instant I may be worshipping God you are a hundred miles away in your thoughts about the day's football games.

We are like St. Paul who said of himself: For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want but the evil I do not want is what I do.

You and I do not intend to get distracted when we fold our hands in prayer. We never intend to have our minds drift off in the middle of the sermon. We want to do the good, to truly worship God, but the most trivial things push aside our Lord and Savior and creator. The most foolish and trivial things take the place of honor and worship in our hearts *in our lives*

How fitting that these characters should surround us. Yes Lord, I'll die with you Peter says in one moment. Jesus? I never heard of him, he is swearing in the next.

Watch with me for a little while. Jesus said to his favorite three. And they slept. Not during one of my sermons, but during Jesus most difficult hour.

So I could say to you this morning, God expects you folks to pay attention. And I doubt that it would do any good.

Or I could have you write on your card a pledge to be here every Sunday but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things would still grow like weeds in you, choking out the good seed that God has planted.

So instead of asking you to do the good that St. Paul said he could not do, I ask you to set your heart and your mind on what God has done.

That is what St. Paul did when after lamenting how he could not do the good he wanted he cried out, Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Then the answer: Thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Your hope does not depend upon the quality of your worship, the sincerity of your prayers, how well you can block out the distractions. Your hope and my hope are in Jesus Christ. Christ has done everything necessary for our salvation. Christ delivers us from sin and death and the devil through sharing his dying and victory with us in the water, in the bread and in the wine. All that Christ has done will be poured over Thomas this morning, will be tasted and swallowed and digested as you eat and drink next week. All that Christ has done is yours this day as you hear and believe.

We gather to worship, we say. But mostly we are fed. Every ear that is open to hear, every hand that is extended to receive God fills here.

Sometimes I have wondered, though, about why God calls us to be together on Sunday mornings. Quiet places, alone places do seem to have fewer distractions.

Yesterday I had a thought I kind of like. Maybe God knows that wherever we worship we are like a blinking lightbulb, one moment on, bright, glowing, the next off, cold dead. Maybe God brings us together so that we are like a blinking Christmas display as we worship. Maybe God really sees us together.

~~Best what of the world~~
~~is to be done:~~
Are we playing church, then, while the world is going to hell? No, we are being
made into ~~it~~ people of faith who ~~are~~ ^{Christians} ~~are~~ ^{put} into the world in love & in service.

You have a card and a pencil, And I gave you no instructions. Write
an offering to God this day. put it in the plates with the offerings of
money. A word of worship, a word of asking, a word of promise. I will
read your words. Your Lord will have seen them before I do.