



Sermon Transcript February 24, 2019

Worshiping God in the Corporate Place Re-Presenting the Gospel Isaiah 6:1-13

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on February 24, 2019 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com.

Sermon Text
Isaiah 6:1-13

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!”

⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and “the house was filled with smoke. ⁵ And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

⁸ And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.” ⁹ And he said, “Go, and say to this people:

“‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ ¹⁰ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.” ¹¹ Then I said, “How long, O Lord?” And he said: “Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, ¹² and the LORD removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. ¹³ And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled.” The holy seed is its stump.

Introduction

One of my early childhood memories comes from Kindergarten. It was in Kindergarten that I was first introduced to something called “show and tell.” For this activity, you had to bring to school some object from home to “show” to the class and then you had to “tell” your classmates about it. While I can’t remember anything specific that I brought for “show and tell,” (I probably brought a baseball glove) I can remember being excited about it. I can remember being excited about sharing the story behind why a certain object was important to me and I always looked forward to seeing what other kids brought with them and the stories that went along with their presentation.

Educators of children and adults speak to the power of the activity of “show and tell.” One educator of adults testified that this activity often leads to adults telling their most important stories.¹ She recounted some of the stories her adult students shared through the simple activity of “show and tell.” For example, one student showed a pebble she carries with her everyday. Why would someone carry a pebble with them everyday? She went on to recount a motorcycle accident she had while riding out in the mountains. Lying alongside of the road in the middle of nowhere, she was bleeding profusely. She had ruptured an artery. Her friend grabbed a pebble, a small stone, and pressed it against the wound and instructed her to hold it there while she went to get help. When the paramedics came they said she would not have survived had she not pressed that stone up against her wound. So she carries a stone with her everyday to remind her of something that saved her life. Obviously, this is a significant story in her life.

Another student revealed a baby blanket that had been passed down from generation to generation within her family. Each mother embroidered their initials into it and then would use it to wrap their newborn in it. This woman from Columbia was living in the States with her two children and that blanket made her feel connected to her family back home. That blanket was more than just any blanket. It was an object that tells a story that touches the heart and unites her to her family. That is why “show and tell” is powerful. Stories are powerful.

We are in the middle of a four part sermon series on corporate worship. We are talking about what we do when we gather here Sunday after Sunday. Why do we do what we do? What should we do when we gather together each and every Sunday?

If I were to ask you to describe what we do when we come together each and every Sunday, I can imagine how one might respond. One might say that we worship God by

praising him with the songs we sing. We confess our faith by rehearsing what we believe and by confessing our sin. We give of our offering, read the Scripture and pray. We listen to the Word of God being preached. We close with a song and a benediction. When you put it that way, it all seems rather disconnected.

The biblical word for what we do each and every Sunday is the word “liturgy.” It comes from the Greek word *latreia* and it is found in Romans 12:1. Here Paul talks about our *spiritual act of worship*. Liturgy literally means “the work of the people.” James Smith says that liturgy is “what the church as a people does when they gather to worship.”² Every church has a liturgy. Some are formal in their liturgy. Some are less formal in their liturgy. But the question is, “why do we do what we do and how do we decide what we do when we come together to worship? What is our ‘liturgy’ and what guides us in deciding what we do when we come to worship?

Bryan Chapell wrote a book called *Christ Centered Worship*. In it he said that “Worship cannot simply be a matter of arbitrary choice, church tradition or personal preference.”³ In other words, there needs to be a reason behind why we do what we do. There needs to be a reason behind the structure of our worship. And so, what is the rhyme and reason behind our worship? I would submit to you that the rhyme and the reason that shapes our worship should be the gospel. Robert Webber says that the structure of our worship service “communicates our understanding of the gospel story.”⁴ We are not just shaped by the message we proclaim when we preach the Word. But we are also shaped by what we do when we gather for worship.

I would love for us to see what we are doing each and every Sunday in our corporate worship to be something like “show and tell.” Being people rooted in the Reformation, the pulpit and the sermon has become the centering of our worship. I am all for preaching. But it is my impression that we often think that the message is in “the message” that is preached. But the message—which is the gospel—also needs to be conveyed in all that we do when we come to worship. When all the elements are put together, they should tell the story of the gospel. Through our activity of worship we are “showing” the gospel each week as we retell the most precious story we know. It is such a precious story to us, that like that woman’s pebble, we never want it to leave our side. Like that pebble, this story has saved our lives and continues to shape us. Or like that blanket, it is a story that connects us to generations before us and generations to come. In reality, our individual stories are being shaped by the grand story of God in the gospel. That is what we are here to do this morning. We are here to “show and tell” the gospel that continues to shape us as a people.

This morning, I want to answer the question, “Is it true?” Is it true that we should be retelling the gospel each and every Sunday through what we do when we gather to worship? I want to first answer that question through Scripture.. But then I want to demonstrate how this has been true historically in the church. And even how this has been a characteristic of the evangelical church from the very beginning. Then I want to illustrate how we try to rehearse the gospel through what we do locally here at WEFC and how we can even improve upon that.

Then I want to take three elements of our worship service to illustrate the role they play in helping us “show and tell” the gospel. I want to highlight the Call to Worship, the Confession and the Benediction. Next Sunday, we will talk about the role of singing in our weekly worship service.

Worship: Retelling the Gospel

Here is what we have seen up to this point in our conversation on corporate worship. Up to this point, we haven't been very practical in our conversation. Rather, our conversation about worship has been more theological. We have seen up to this point that worship is not just something “we do” but rather, it is an act of God's grace that invites us to participate in the fellowship that exists between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. And so worship is relational as we delight in the fellowship of the Triune God. Then last week we saw that we enter this fellowship through the priestly work of Jesus. And so worship is done in the name of Jesus. Jesus must be front and center in our worship. And so that leads us to a very practical question. How do we keep Jesus at the center of our worship? How do we enjoy and maintain our fellowship with the Triune God? The answer is found in retelling the gospel through what we do— through what we “show and tell” in our worship

A Biblical Perspective: Isaiah 6 gives us a wonderful picture of what our weekly worship ought to look like. This passage is a vision that Isaiah has of the very throne room of God. It is a heavenly vision. The actions of Isaiah in this heavenly scene describe for us Isaiah's response of worship. We often pray in the Lord's Prayer, “*thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*” If this is Isaiah's response of worship in this heavenly scene, how much more should it serve as the outline for our worship on this earthly scene.

Isaiah 6 begins with something you might be tempted to gloss over, but it is important when it comes to worship. It begins, “*In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord.*” This passage begins with a historical marker. The activity of this passage is placed in real

time. *"In the year that King Uzziah died."* King Uzziah was king of Judah for 52 years. His reign brought great stability and prosperity to Judah. His downfall was that his success went to his head. He went into the temple to burn incense, an activity that God had restricted to the priests. When he was confronted about this, he got angry and so God struck him with leprosy. At the very least, this tells that God is not casual about how we worship. For the last ten years of his reign, King Uzziah was secluded from his people and his son became the face of the monarchy. And so when we read, *"In the year that King Uzziah died"* we note that it is a time of transition. It is a time of human uncertainty. It is a time of loss. What will happen with a new leader and with all the gains enjoyed from the previous king? And furthermore, when you read the book of Isaiah, you discover that it is a time of great spiritual decline. And so, from the very beginning of this heavenly scene of worship, we recognize that when we come to worship, we are coming out of a broken world—a world in real time and yet a world filled with uncertainty. That is our world. That is our context for worship. In a world filled with dying kings we come to worship an undying King who holds court and who never changes.

So we hear Isaiah say, *"I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up."* As he comes out of the brokenness of this world, he comes into the very presence of God. He sees magnificent heavenly creatures flying before the throne of God singing, *"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"* It is seeing the greatness of God that puts all these things in perspective. I am reading a book by John Piper called *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*. It is a book that calls the preacher to lift up the glory of God before the people. Piper says this: "It is not the job of the Christian preacher to give people moral or psychological pep talks about how to get along in the world; someone else can do that. But most of our people have no one in the world to tell them, week in and week out, about the supreme beauty and majesty of God. And so many of them are starved for that God-centered vision"⁵ that Isaiah saw.

But once he saw this vision of the glory and holiness of God, what was Isaiah's cry? *"Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips."* When he saw the holiness and the glory of God, it was natural for him to confess his sin and the sin of his people. To put this verse in our context, I don't think this was his "conversion experience." Rather, this is the normal reaction for any of us who encounter the glory of God. It exposes our sin and therefore, our only fitting response is to say, *"God have mercy on me, a sinner."* It is at the point of confession that God atones for Isaiah's sin and assures him that he is forgiven. He assures Isaiah in verse 7, *"your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."*

It is at this point, Isaiah hears “*the voice of the Lord.*” It is at this point that God instructs him and then Isaiah responds. In response to God’s instruction, Isaiah says, “*Here I am! Send me.*” What is interesting is that with the rest of this passage, God informs Isaiah that it is not going to be easy. He tells Isaiah that he will be serving God among a people who have dull hearts, heavy ears and blind eyes. But nonetheless, God is at work and Isaiah is sent back out into the world to serve God.

This passage becomes the template and the outline for our worship that “shows and tells” the story of the gospel. We come out of a broken world, often discouraged and challenged in our faith. Both the big picture of this broken world and the little picture of our lives as we struggle in this world forms the context of where we are coming from when we come to worship. But then we are immediately pointed to God. We are reminded of the God we worship, the one who sits over time and never changes. But it doesn’t take long for us to quickly realize how little faith we have and how we fail to love God and others and to trust God. We quickly become aware of other gods that we worship—that we are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— and we need to respond with confession. And so we confess, “*God have mercy on me and on us.*” But because of the cross of Jesus, we are assured and reminded that our sins are atoned for and so we find rest for our souls in Jesus. It is at this point, we are ready to be instructed so that we can be sent back out into the world to be bear the image of God to a hurting world. And so after hearing the Word of God read, prayed and preached, like Isaiah we stand and we say, “*Here I am! Send me!*” And we know full well that we are entering a world that is filled with dull hearts, heavy ears and blind eyes. We know that nothing has changed “out there” since we came to the worship service this morning. But we serve the living God! We know that God is at work in this world. And so we are sent and so we go. This is what it means to “show and tell” the story of the gospel through our worship. That is what we are doing when we come Sunday after Sunday.

It is the same principle Jesus addresses in his instructions for when we take communion. It is a tangible way we can “show and tell” the gospel in our worship. In 1 Corinthians 11:26 we are reminded, “*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.*” In other words, through the Lord’s Table we “show and tell” the gospel. Paul said the same thing about his preaching. He didn’t come with fancy and lofty words. Instead he said in 1 Corinthians 2:2, “*For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*” His preaching was centered on the gospel. When Israel was delivered from bondage in Egypt, they wrote a song in Exodus 15 to retell their story of redemption and how God delivered them. The showing and telling of the gospel is the biblical pattern for our songs and they shape us.

A Historical Perspective: There is also a historical perspective for us to consider when it comes to our order of worship. We do have 2000 years of church history to look back on and consider. In his book, *Christ Centered Worship*, Bryan Chapell traces 2000 years of church history and looks at the major Christian traditions from highly liturgical to more contemporary. He observed that when you examine all of these traditions and look for what is common in Christian worship, here is what he found to be present in all these traditions of Christian worship.

Recognition of God's Character—Adoration
Acknowledging of our character—Confession
Affirmation of Grace—Assurance
Expression of Devotion—Thanksgiving
Desire for Aid in Living for God—Petition and Intercession
Acquiring Knowledge for Pleasing God—Instruction from God's Word
Living unto God with his Blessing—Charge and Benediction

Chapell concludes that the consistent message in all of this is that throughout all these traditions at the heart of Christian worship is "The Gospel Re-presented."⁶ This has been the consistent pattern for Christian worship.

An Evangelical Perspective: The gospel has long been at the heart of evangelical worship. That is what we are: Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church. The Christian historian, Mark Noll makes note of this as he reflects on the history of the hymns that emerged out the evangelical movement and the Great Awakening of the 1700's. He noted that the Trinity, the holiness of God, the need for a Savior, new life in the Holy Spirit, encouragement to endure brokenness and relieve pain and to bind up the wounds of the world are all themes traced throughout the hymns of the early evangelical movement. But then he said this, "It is impossible to illustrate quickly the fixation of evangelical hymnody on the saving death of Christ."⁷ In other words, the cross has always been central to the hymns that mark the evangelical movement.

Professor Stephen Marini of Wellesley College tallied the most-often reprinted hymns in American Protestant hymnbooks from the colonial era to a couple of decades after World War II. The two most reprinted hymns in that time period were *Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee . . . Be of sin the double cure, Cleanse me from its guilt and power.* The second one is "And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood? Died he for me, who caused his pain, For me, who him to death pursued. Amazing love! How can it be? That thou, my God, should die for me." Standing in that

same tradition, we sang this morning: *Hallelujah praise the One who set me free. Hallelujah death has lost its grip on me. You have broken every chain. There's salvation in Your name. Jesus Christ my living hope.* Like the children of Israel, our songs retell the story of our redemption.

A WEFC Perspective: Retelling the story of the gospel is what we endeavor to do each and every Sunday. Our elements of worship are not haphazard and without reason. We started this morning with a Call to Worship and then in song we acknowledged the Triune God. We were reminded of what God has done for us in Christ. We confessed our sin and rested in his “Blessed Assurance” We gave our offerings in response, we listened to the reading of the Word, we brought our prayer requests to God and now we are listening to the voice of God. In a moment we will stand like Isaiah and say, *Here am I! Send me!* And we will have been given what we need to be the image of God in a broken world this week.

As a result of the church survey, we have been forced to rethink what we do when we come to worship. It is more than the songs we sing. If you could come each and every week knowing that it is going to be “show and tell” - I think that will help you understand what we are doing. My son and his wife attend a Baptist church north of Boston and I like the way they outline their service with four headings:

God Gathers Us To Himself
God Speaks to Us Through His Word
God Moves Us to Respond
God Sends Us Out to Serve⁸

There are a lot of different ways you can do that in a worship service. But it is my job to make sure that we Re-present the gospel each and every week because this is what transforms us and changes us.

Showing the Gospel through Worship

Let me briefly illustrate the way certain elements of the worship service contribute to Re-presenting the gospel. My hope is that if you are conscious of this, it will help you participate more fully in the “show and tell” of worship.

The Call to Worship: The “Call to Worship” does not just mean that the service is beginning. Nor is a “call to worship” a casual greeting that asks you how you are doing.

A Call to Worship is a declaration that tells us why we are here. “*Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.*” James Smith said the fact that we are even here says something. “Singles and families, seniors and toddlers, make the effort to gather together at an appointed time, not of their choosing. We could be still snug in our beds at home or sitting in our kitchen sipping some coffee. But instead, we are part of—lets be honest—a rather motley crew that has made its way here. . . . The rather mundane fact that people show up is, however, an indicator of something fundamental: a people has gathered in response to a call.”⁹ Michael Horton says, “Whenever we gather for public worship it is because we have been summoned. That is what ‘church’ means: *ekklesia*, ‘called out.’”¹⁰ Like Isaiah, in the year of King Uzziah, we are a people “called from the world, from our homes, from our families to be constituted into a community capable of praising God . . . We are a people gathered from the nations and therefore we are one people.”¹¹ The Call to Worship reminds us why we are here and who we are. We are the people of God, called out from this world and set apart unto God. “ . . . *For he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.*” All of this is communicated in “the Call to Worship.”

Confession: I don’t think I need to work hard at illustrating the role confession plays at “showing and telling” the gospel in our worship. I just feel the need to mention it because I think it is often missing in our contemporary evangelical worship. This is not to suggest that we fall in and out of salvation. We are eternally secure in Christ. But our fellowship with God can be broken by our sin. When Jesus teaches us to pray, he teaches us to pray, *forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*. And though we are saints in Christ, we all wrestle with sin. It comes to light when we shine the glory of God on the corners of our lives. Bryan Chapell made an interesting point when he said, “It is reasonable to question whether worship is Christian worship if there is no opportunity for confession . . . If there really has been no confession in a worship service, then there has been no true apprehension of God.”¹² Can you imagine Isaiah coming before the throne of God and not being overcome with his own sin. That would have been the epitome of human arrogance and human ignorance.

Benediction: Lastly, when we think of the Benediction, it is not just the signal that the service is over. It is not just a closing prayer and a pronouncement of blessing. Instead, it God scattering the people who were gathered. And he is scattering us to be his image in the places we live and the places we work. When you stand and receive the benediction, you are taking the Word of the Gospel that has been sown in your heart through the “show and tell” of our worship and the Word that has been preached and you are standing in the tradition of Isaiah who responded to the voice of God with the

only response that is fitting to those who embrace Jesus. “*Here am I! Send me!*” I know it is the “year that King Uzziah died and uncertainty abounds.” But I also know that the kingdom of God has come in Jesus and he is using me to bring his presence. “*Based on the mercy of God, offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. This is your spiritual worship.*” This is your “liturgy!”

Conclusion

Why do we do what we do when we gather to worship each and every week? It is our aim Re-present the gospel. To “show and tell” the story that has saved our lives and has been passed down to us from precious generations. My prayer is that this message would give greater meaning to what we do each and every week and we would be shaped by the gospel we “show and tell” week after week. Glory to the Father, And to the Son, And to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be. World without end. Hallelujah! Amen!

¹Sarah Lynn “The Unexpected Power of Show and Tell” www.longmanhouseusa.com December 1, 2011

²James K. A. Smith *Desiring the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009) 134

³Bryan Chapell *Christ Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009) 85

⁴Robert Weber *Worship is a Verb* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1985) 29

⁵John Piper *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990) 12

⁶Chapell, 100

⁷Mark Noll “We Are What We Sing” in *Christianity Today*, July 12, 1999

⁸North Shore Community Baptist Church www.nscbc.org

⁹Smith, 160

¹⁰Michael Horton *A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of God-centered Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002) 24

¹¹Stanley Hauerwas” *Liturgical Shape of the Christian Life: Teaching Christian Ethics as Worship in Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995)157

¹²Chapell, 88

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COMMUNITY GROUPS



Getting To Know Me Questions

1. If you were doing “show and tell” to reveal something unique about you, what would you bring to show to your community group and what story would you tell? (could be a treasured possession, a hobby, something you made , etc)
2. What are your earliest memories of church, namely the worship service? Describe what the worship was like? What stands out to you? How did it impact you?
3. What did you learn about worship from the sermon this week? Did anything surprise you?



Diving Into The Word

4. Read Isaiah 6:1-13. Discuss how the pattern in Isaiah’s worship “shows and tells” the gospel. How is this helpful for our understanding of corporate worship?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 11:26. Why do you think we need to keep proclaiming the gospel to ourselves?
6. Look at the common elements of worship found in the variety of Christian traditions. How do you see these elements in our worship services? What could we do better to “Re-present the gospel” each week?
7. Pick at least one of these: The Call to Worship, the Confession or the Benediction. What did you learn about this element of the worship service and how does it help you participate in worship?



Taking It Home

8. Based on your conversation, how do you plan to approach this coming Sunday?
9. Who would you like to invite to the Easter Sermon series: Finding God in the Hard Place?