



## Sermon Transcript

### March 3, 2019

## Worshiping God in the Corporate Place

### Let's Sing!

Colossians 3:12-16 and Ephesians 5:15-21

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on March 3, 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](http://www.wethefc.com).

## **Sermon Text**

### **Colossians 3:12-16**

<sup>12</sup>Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup>bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup>And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup>and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body, And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup>And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

### **Ephesians 5:15-21**

<sup>15</sup>Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup>making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup>Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup>And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup>addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, <sup>20</sup>giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father, <sup>21</sup>submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

## Introduction

Colossians 3:12-16 and Ephesians 5:15-21 are parallel passages. Both of them are written by Paul. You can line them up side by side and see quite a few similarities between the two passages. One of the similarities that emerges from these two passages is that God's people are a singing people. When you take these two passages and put them together, you discover that the person *"filled with the Spirit"* and the person who has *"the Word of Christ dwelling within them richly"* is a person who has a song that emerges from their heart. Paul describes such a person this way in Colossians 3:16. He or she, or better yet, "they" are one found *"singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."*

This is our final sermon of a four-part sermon series on corporate worship and up to this point we really haven't said much about singing. On the one hand, worship is much more than singing. Last week we looked at the entire "worship service" and how it is put together to "re-present" the gospel to us. The whole thing, from the Call to Worship to the Benediction is part of our corporate *"act of worship."* That involves singing. But there is much more than singing that happens in our worship service. Quite frankly, how we live our lives once we leave this place is also our *"act of worship."* Our lives are an act of worship unto God. That is the point of Romans 12:1. Here Paul urges us *"to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."* Our worship of God doesn't come to a conclusion when the Benediction is pronounced. All of life is an act of worship to God.

So yes, worship is more than singing. But at the same time, singing is a big part of corporate worship. This is so much so, that the word "worship" has become synonymous with "singing." When people talk about "worship" their minds often go immediately to "singing." There is a reason for that. In the Bible, singing is often tied to what it means to worship God. "There are more than four hundred references to singing in the Bible and at least fifty direct commands to sing."<sup>1</sup> For example, Psalm 149:1 commands, *"Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints."* The biggest book of the Bible is the book of Psalms. The Hebrew word for "psalm" is the Hebrew word for "song." That is what the psalms are. They are songs. They were meant to be sung. Often the psalms come with musical instructions. Consequently, the corporate singing of God's people is a critical part of our worship of God.

This morning I want to begin by looking at these two passages and from these passages, I want to make four observations about the role singing plays in the forming of our faith.

What are we expressing when we sing together? Then, I am going to invite Janice Kooker to come and share the results of the survey we took this past year on the topic of worship. Based on what we learned from the survey and wanting to follow these biblical principles for worship, I want to share with you our philosophy of worship that seeks to honor the last verse in our passage this morning. Ephesians 5:21 instructs us to “*submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*” Our corporate worship is an expression of our love for God and our love for each other.

### **Corporate Singing Expresses Our Corporate Unity**

When I look at these two passages, I am struck by the tone of the context. These two passages that reference “*singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*” are set in the context of our unity and our oneness in Christ. In Colossians 3:12, Paul reminds us who we are. We are “*God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved.*” And so he says in verse 15 that we “*were called in one body.*” This is the same thought that governs our passage in Ephesians. It is just a little further removed from our passage this morning. In Ephesians 4:4-6, Paul writes, “*There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*” In fact, some think that this was an early hymn of the church that affirms our unity in Christ.

When we began our conversation on worship, the first thing we said is that worship is not just something we do. Rather, it is an act of God’s grace that we are brought into the fellowship and the oneness that God the Father and God the Son have enjoyed through all eternity. We heard Jesus pray in John 17:21 that the oneness that Father and the Son have enjoyed for all eternity may also be in us. He prayed, “*that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*”

When we sing together, we are giving visible expression to the truth that in Christ we are one body. In song, we come together with one voice. The Gettys, who are modern hymn-writers, remind us that when we come to the corporate gathering for worship “all our individual stories meet at the cross-section of the worship service. We are reminded that we are not alone—we are members of a multi-generational, multi-ethnic, multi-*everything* family.”<sup>2</sup> So when we stand together across generational lines and across ethnic lines and combine our voices in song, we are demonstrating our unity in Christ. And perhaps, more fundamentally, we are giving demonstration to our identity. We are “*God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved . . . one body.*”

Psalm 137 is an interesting psalm. In this psalm, the people of Israel are living in exile in Babylon. They have been removed from their homeland and now they face the challenge of what it looks like to be faithful to God while living in exile. In this psalm, their captors are taunting them. They say to the people of God, “*Sing us one of the songs of Zion!*” That is an interesting statement because these “songs of Zion” are songs that speak to their identity. These songs convey who they are. They are the children of Israel. They are the people of God and their song gives demonstration to who they are. But the people of Israel respond with a lament, “*How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?*” James Smith says that Israel’s challenge is not too unlike our challenge: how do we live as the peculiar people of God in a foreign land . . . Figuring out how to be faithful in exile is here tied up with learning how to sing in a strange land.”<sup>3</sup> Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 2:11 that we are *sojourners and exiles* in this world. When we sing together—*psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*—we are reminding ourselves who we are and whose we are and that in this foreign land we are the people of God. We are one!

### **Corporate Worship Expresses Our Hearts of Gratitude**

We don’t sing together just because we are commanded to sing. We are not reluctant to sing. We sing because we are compelled to sing. Singing is a natural response to what is inside of us. That is part of how God has made us. Christians aren’t the only ones who sing. Our world is filled with all kinds of singing. In fact, nothing inspires a good song more than the topic of love. But if anyone has something to sing about, it is God’s people. We have tasted “divine love.” And so Paul says in Ephesians 5:19-20 that we are “*singing and making melody to the Lord with our heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father.*” Our corporate singing begins with the heart.

What is it that compels us to sing? Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 that it is “*Christ’s love that compels us.*” He was stating the reason why he is so bold in proclaiming the gospel. He was compelled by the love of God. He went on to say, “*because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*” It is the gospel that also compels us to sing. It is the gospel that causes this melody to rise up within our hearts. It is like we noted last week about evangelical hymnody. The hymns of the evangelical movement have always been fixated on the cross, the most vivid symbol of God’s love for us. And so “we cherish the old rugged cross.” It is the love of God that causes our hearts to burst forth with song.

This is why every generation bursts forth with a new song. In their vernacular and in

their language they are responding with gratitude for what God has done for them in Christ. It is only natural to respond with song. It is interesting to make note of the three classifications of song in our passage this morning—*psalms, hymns, spiritual songs*. It was hard to find real clear lines that distinguish between these three categories of songs. But their presence speaks to the idea of variety of song. And even if you just stick with the category of the psalms. When you hear the word “*psalm*” your mind immediately goes to the first hymnbook of the church, which is the Old Testament Book of Psalms. But then in the New Testament, there are new “psalms” that emerge. The “Magnificat” is the song that Mary sang upon hearing that she would give birth to the Messiah. Zechariah composed a “psalm” upon the birth of his son, John the Baptist. Simeon burst out in song in what is known as the *Nunc Dimittis* where upon seeing the promised Messiah, the baby Jesus, he joyfully sang, “*Now you are letting your servant depart in peace . . . For my eyes have seen your salvation.*” In each case, it was natural for the people of God to break out in song in response to what God has done for us in Christ.

John Frame makes note that all throughout church history whenever there is a major movement of God, it is accompanied with new songs. The Reformation produced new songs and one of the knocks against these new songs was that they reflected the popular style of the music of that day. The same is true about the hymns of the 1700’s. These hymns often stressed the personal experience of redemption and some thought that you should only sing the psalms or that these hymns were too subjective or too experiential and therefore not as doctrinally sound as the songs from the Reformation.<sup>4</sup> This has always been a source of tension from one generation to the next. But one thing should not surprise us. A heart that has been touched by the gospel will bring forth jubilant song. And you can tell a lot about the heart of a congregation by the way they sing.

### **Corporate Worship Expresses Our Common Faith**

Did you notice in these two passages how our singing goes in two directions. Obviously, one direction is upward. We sing to the Lord. Paul even says so much in Ephesians 5:19. We are “*singing and making melody to the Lord with our hearts.*” But did you notice that when we sing, we are also singing to each other. In that same verse, Paul says that we are “*addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.*” He says in Colossians that we are “*teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.*”

It is very interesting to consider the relationship between singing and the “*Word of Christ dwelling in you richly.*” Perhaps when you see that we are to “*Let the Word of*

*Christ dwell in your richly*” you think of things like preaching and memorizing the Scripture and doing your devotions. All of these are good things and no doubt ways that God’s Word is brought into our hearts. But did you ever think about music being an important way in which God’s Word dwells within us? Smith says, “Music gets ‘in’ us in ways that other forms of discourse rarely do.”<sup>5</sup> In fact, Don Sailors says that theology “was sung long before it was put into doctrinal theology.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, we learn the truths of the faith through the songs that are imbedded in our hearts. It is amazing to me how many elderly saints, even with a diminished capacity to recall things, can readily conjure up the words of treasured hymns that have long been part of their faith. And the mere signing of those songs, strengthens their faith, warms their heart and brings the peace of Christ like nothing else.

Therefore, whatever we sing, needs to be anchored in the truth and most assuredly needs to point us to the gospel. Like the Psalms, they apply faith to all the situations of life. I had a young adult say to me recently, that she loves to hear the congregation singing around her when we sing on Sunday morning. When we sing together, we are singing to each other the truths of God that will hold us through life. And when it comes to the music, the Gettys say that the highest form of creativity is simplicity.<sup>7</sup> I have the advantage of being here for three services each Sunday. So I go through the service three times. Often, during the early part of the week, I find myself humming and singing one of the songs that we sang the previous Sunday. That is part of the blessing of corporate worship. It plants the Word of Christ in our hearts and it shapes us.

### **Corporate Worship Expresses Our Love For Each Other**

Finally, our corporate worship gives us an opportunity to express our common delight in Christ. But sometimes it is hard to express your delight in Christ when we aren’t speaking your language. I read recently of a missionary from China who came home to the States. When he came home he said, “It is so good to be home again and to worship in my language.” Not only was the language a barrier, they had to be quiet because it was dangerous for them to meet. But now he could fully express himself. Perhaps, when it comes to the style of music, it may seem like you are being asked to sing in Chinese if it doesn’t speak “your language.” It could make it hard for you to engage.

Paul reminds us that we ought to be careful how we treat one another. He says in Colossians 3:12, *“Put on ..... compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put*

*on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” At the end of Ephesians 5, he instructs us to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”*

That is really what is behind the survey. How well are we loving the entire body of Christ through worship? The Survey Evaluation Team was made up of Pastor Michael Conserva, Brian Hucks, Janice Kookan, Jon Rascius, and Kyle Voiland. Janice Kookan has a PhD in Research Methods with expertise in the construction and analysis of surveys and so we have greatly benefited from her expertise.

We administered this survey back in May 2018, and we received 168 responses. We included a variety of question formats including multiple choice, scale of satisfaction, and open ended questions on five topical sections related to church life. These sections are Community Groups, Worship, Congregational Meetings, Communications, and Personal gifts and service.

Thank you again for providing such rich feedback, comprising a full range of ideas and recommendations. Today I am going to share some information on Worship that has informed some recent conversations here at WEFC.

We asked you to identify your level of satisfaction on a 5 point scale from very satisfied to very unsatisfied on the following 8 aspects of worship: Music, preaching, length of worship service, style of worship – music, style of worship – other than music, communion and security.

For all 8 aspects of worship 60% or more of the respondents indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied. The satisfaction scores varied across these aspects of worship, communicating the greatest satisfaction – between 80 and 90% - with Pastor Scott’s preaching and sermon series. Not surprisingly, in the area of music, scores were lower reflecting the congregation’s diversity of style and taste. Respondents also scored satisfaction with security lower – again, not surprising considering recent events that have raised our awareness and concern about security.

In addition to the satisfaction questions, we asked an open ended question for people to share other thoughts, feelings and ideas about worship. 73 people provided additional comments. Here is a breakdown of the topics of these comments: 25 represented people asking for more hymns, 16 were on preaching and sermon series, 10 were on security, 4 requested more prayer during worship, and the remaining comments were on a variety of topics.



As our survey team spent time studying these results and sharing them with the leadership, there was an immediate recognition of some things to do and a call to action. Some steps have been taken already. In recognition of the themes communicated in the survey, Pastor Mike shared the security plan with us at the congregational meeting in January, which is in process of being implemented. Pastor Scott developed a philosophy of worship that he will share with you in a moment. He also dedicated a 4-part sermon series on the topic of worship. In addition, you may have also noticed that we have already taken steps on music style to be more intentional in representing the whole body through greater focus on the variety of worship music.

Thank you again for your input. I developed a one page fact sheet that has more detail and numbers on it. Should you have more questions, you can pick it up in the literature rack after service.

## **Philosophy of Worship**

So given all that we have talked about over the past four weeks, what is our philosophy of worship? What are the principles that we want to guide us as we come together to worship? We have five principles and each one begins with the letter “P”.

### Praise: God centered and God saturated worship

The goal of our worship is to joyfully exalt the triune God and affirm our faith and trust in God. Therefore, God is the sum and substance of all our preaching, teaching, praying, singing, giving, serving, etc. That is the focus of those who lead us in worship and it should be your aim as you come here each and every Sunday. We are here to worship the Triune God who has brought us into the fellowship they have enjoyed for eternity.

### Participation: Worship is the response of the people of God

We are all here this morning to participate in worship. You are not here just to observe. When we pray, pray with us. When we confess, confess with us. When we sing, sing with us. You get out of it what you put into it. How you participate impacts the people around you. We are collectively expressing our faith to God and to each other and to anyone who comes here who is in journey. So come ready to participate.

### Proclamation: Through the worship service, it is our aim to re-present the gospel

The gospel is God’s means of conquering the effects of sin. And so it is our aim that the flow of the worship service will lead us through the gospel so that we can be sent back out to be salt and light wherever God takes us.

So we will . . .

Recognize God's Character – Adoration  
Acknowledge our Character – Confession  
Affirm God's Grace – Assurance  
Expression our Devotion – Thanksgiving  
Desire for God's Aid in Living for God – Petition and Intercession  
Acquire Knowledge for Pleasing God – Read God's Word and Preaching  
Commune with God and His People – Communion  
Live Unto God and His Blessing – Charge and Benediction

Peoples: The focus of the gospel is “all peoples” from all cultures

This has implications when it comes to the practicality of worship and the diverse groups of people (ethnic and generational) that make up the church. The local church also is located in a community with diverse cultures or even a distinct culture. Out of love, the local church ought to consider ways to embrace the diversity that comes with “all peoples” and communicate the timeless truths in ways that are intelligible to the people that make up the church body and the people they want to reach. There is also a tradition to respect and draw from as we seek to honor God in our worship. And so one very practical step we are taking is to be more inclusive with the hymns we use.

Practice: Habitual corporate worship shapes us and shapes our worldview

The weekly habit of corporate worship shapes us. This is not just true with the habit of coming together for the purpose of worship. But it also speaks to the intentionality of what we do when we come together. This speaks to the priority of corporate worship and the need to think carefully about what we do when we gather to worship. So do not neglect coming together for the purpose of worship.

## **Conclusion**

I want to close this morning with an illustration and a word of thanks. First of all, in Barcelona, Spain, there is a cathedral by the name of Sagrada Familia. Construction began in 1882 and it is set to be completed in 2026. It will take 144 years to build this cathedral. Several generations will take part in completing what architect Antoni Gaudi had set out to do. But each generation will build on the other.

That is the way it is with the music of the church. As living stones, we are being built into one building. So it is with our songs. The songs from the past and the songs in the present and the songs of the future, will together shape the church. And so we draw

from the past. We sing with the present in mind. And we look to the future, when a new song will be sung in the coming kingdom from a redeemed choir from every tribe and tongue and nation and from every generation. It will be a world of delight and festivity, of joyful song, as well as a world of racial reconciliation where the choir is a reconciled community.<sup>8</sup> If that heavenly choir is made up of every tribe and nation, get ready for an eternity of a variety of music! And so right now we are practicing for that day when we will be so filled with joy that you will not be able to contain it. Song will burst forth! And so one way we practice is by out of reverence for Christ, submitting to each other. The older to the younger and the younger to the older. The white to the black and black to the brown and so on . . . That is the beauty of the body.

And then finally, I want to thank those who lead us in worship week after week. They do a great job. We are blessed with not just talented people, but people who truly love the Lord and want to see you enter into worship. You can honor them and support them by joining them in honoring the one who compels us to sing.

Let's Sing!

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<sup>1</sup>Keith and Kristyn Getty *Sing!* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2017) Kindle Location 426

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., Kindle Location 1065

<sup>3</sup>James K. A. Smith *Desiring the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009) 173

<sup>4</sup>John Frame *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Philipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1996) 115-116

<sup>5</sup>Smith, 171

<sup>6</sup>Don Sailors "Singing Our Lives" in *Practicing our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, ed., Dorothy C. Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997) 185-186

<sup>7</sup>Getty, Kindle Location 1120

<sup>8</sup>Smith, 173

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## COMMUNITY GROUPS



### Getting To Know Me Questions

1. Can you recall your earliest memory of singing? How did it make you feel?
2. What do you experience during congregational singing—feelings like joy, fear, self-consciousness, freedom etc . . . ?
3. What stood out to you from the sermon?



### Diving Into The Word

4. Read Psalm 149. What response do you have personally to the command to sing praise to God? How do you feel about singing not only songs you like but songs you need to sing?
5. Read Ephesians 5:18-20. What is the link between thankfulness and singing? What are some things that might help you cultivate singing with intentional thankfulness?
6. Read Colossians 3:16-17. What is the link between singing and having the Word of Christ dwell in you richly? Is there a hymn or praise song that really speaks to you about the character or nature of God or the truth of the Gospel?
7. Look over the philosophy of worship. Which of the five points stick out to you the most and why? What is your role in corporate worship?



### Taking It Home

8. How could you incorporate singing into your community group?
9. What can you do to prepare your heart for worship this coming Sunday?