

“Seeking the Sacred Unseen Through Worship”

Series: *Seeking the Sacred Unseen*

Scripture: Psalm 95:1-7; Matthew 21:12-17

Rev. Mary Henderson Bowman

January 19, 2025



First Presbyterian
Church of Charlotte

This morning, we begin our series on “Seeking the Sacred Unseen.”

The sacred is, of course, all around us.
Each one of us is sacred and precious.
Creation is sacred.
And, of course, our Triune God is sacred.

As you can tell by the title of the series — one of the truths that we are exploring in this series is the reality that the sacred is not always easily visible.

For example, we worship a God who is invisible.
And, there are sacred things within our selves — and within others — that can be hidden from us.
There is much in creation that is camouflaged.

However, this does not mean that the sacred can't be seen or can't be revealed.
God is ever at work in all sacredness, and God is a God of revelation, of revealing.
This series also reminds us that our seeking matters.

I have a friend who is a birder. He loves to go on walks and on trips that allow him to see a wide variety of birds.
When he first started birding, he wasn't really sure where to look for birds. Except for the birds that he could lure to his feeder, the birds largely stayed hidden. When he first started, he looked for birds at random times and in random places. There was no discipline to it. No intentionality.

As he got more into birding, he found that there were aids that helped him — like binoculars, for example — or different foods to use at the feeder that would bring different birds. He also found that there were certain times of day that were better for bird watching. And that there were certain seasons that yielded new birds. For example, he learned that the migration season was a special time to see birds.

My birding friend was seeking what is often unseen, what can be hidden — and yet he as he joined a community of birders, as he walked and learned from others, as he became more intentional about his search, and as he used aids, he had more meaningful encounters with the birds that he was seeking.

In many ways this is a metaphor for the Christian life.
As we seek what can be hidden, we can benefit from a community (like this morning's) and from an intentional approach.

Just because my friend carried his binoculars didn't mean that he would see the bird that he sought. However, by carrying the binoculars, he was ready and open to an encounter.

The faith life has its own binoculars and aids.
These aids are called spiritual disciplines or practices.
Spiritual disciplines help us to be alert to and ready for the sacred.

It shouldn't surprise you that worship is one of the most important spiritual practices available to us.

“Seeking the Sacred Unseen Through Worship”

Series: *Seeking the Sacred Unseen*

Scripture: Psalm 95:1-7; Matthew 21:12-17

Rev. Mary Henderson Bowman

January 19, 2025



First Presbyterian
Church of Charlotte

Worship is vital to the life of faith.

Worship is a key element to our relationship with God.

Worship — in its simplest sense — is when we give our deepest devotion and highest praise to someone or something.

Worship is an attitude of homage and devotion to something that we deem worthy of our attention, our love, our time.

In many ways, human beings are designed for worship.

We naturally assign meaning to things and value to things.

God is not the only thing that human beings can worship.

We can give our supreme devotion to any number of things.

It is not unusual for us to worship what our culture worships.

It is easy to fall into the worship of work, of comfort, of success, of celebrities, of romance, of belonging, of family, of social media . . . and the list could go on.

“None of these things are — in and of themselves — bad, but when we value these or other things more than we value God, then we end up worshipping lesser things, lesser gods. And these lesser gods will never satisfy us. Only a love relationship with God can do that.”¹

Adele Calhoun’s puts it this way:

“True worship of God happens when we put God first in our lives. When what God says matters more than what other say, and when loving God matters more than being loved [by others]. . . . The heart of worship is to seek to know, and love God.”²

We have just talked about worship as an attitude.

Worship is also activity.

Worship is the action of devotion.

And there are a variety of ways that we can worship God.

We worship . . .

when we gather here for Sunday morning worship,

when we experience a moment of gratitude,

when we observe a time of personal prayer,

when we share joy at the wonders of life,

when we recount a time when God’s grace was palatable and well-timed,

when we create a Sabbath rest

We worship when we continue to seek God when life is hard.

Worship is an attitude of deep devotion.

Worship is the activity of devotion.

Worship is also relational.

¹ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 27.

² Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 50.

“Seeking the Sacred Unseen Through Worship”

Series: *Seeking the Sacred Unseen*

Scripture: Psalm 95:1-7; Matthew 21:12-17

Rev. Mary Henderson Bowman

January 19, 2025



First Presbyterian
Church of Charlotte

Our worship of God is designed to be mutual. God invites us to worship because God knows that we benefit from it since we were designed for it.

Worship is like fuel for our lives.

The Presbyterian Directory of Worship reminds us of this relational aspect of worship:

“God acts with grace; [and] we respond with gratitude. God claims us as beloved children; [and] we proclaim God’s saving love. God redeems us from sin and death; [and] we rejoice in the gift of new life. This rhythm of divine action and human response—found throughout Scripture, human history, and everyday events—shapes all of Christian faith, life, and worship.”³

Worship is relational - it is an avenue to experience the sacred unseen.

It is easy though for us to fall into worship of other things.

It is easy for us to forget our spiritual binoculars and get casual about spiritual birdseed.

We get a glimpse of this in our New Testament reading.

We listened in as Jesus responded to the way worship is happening in Jerusalem.

Jesus is trying to protect space for the worship of God . . . and He actively cleans out the temple so worship can be restored.

The Bible refers to human beings as God’s temple. We ourselves are intended to be houses of prayer.

As I close, I wonder if we can consider:

How does this scene challenge us to consider the distractions and attachments that may clutter our own sacred space within us?

How might we keep our hearts open to God?⁴

Amen.

³ PCUSA Directory of Worship, W-1.0102, https://pbyukon.org/documents/meetings/Winter2017_DFW_Revision.pdf

⁴ Pray as You Go, 22 November 2024, Luke 19:45-48.