

## Worship is Good for You!

*Let them give thanks to the **Lord** for his mercy and the wonders he does for his children.  
Let them offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving and tell of his acts with shouts of joy.*

*Psalm 107: 21-22*

You know, if you really think about it, worship is an odd thing. All around the world, people come together to form faith communities large and small. In the midst of worship people stand, they kneel, they prostrate themselves on the ground, and they often make strange noises and gestures---and that's just in the Episcopal Church!

Sometimes the space used for worship is decorated with symbols; sometimes the space is sparse and bare. Sometimes there is smoke from incense; sometimes there is water. There is speaking, singing, chanting and even dancing. Often there is just silence.

Both past and present, worship is an almost universal human phenomenon. Throughout history, whether the god was Baal, Zeus, or Thor, the human creature worshipped. And almost every faith expression has some form of corporate worship – from Buddhism to Islam to Christianity, we join with others to worship.

As Christians, our Holy Scripture makes very clear that we are created to worship God. Now we must be careful how we handle this tidbit of information. One could easily imagine God as some sort of big human who needs our pandering in order to keep from smiting us and blowing us to smithereens; this is a horrible image of God that exists to this day.

But even though we were made in the likeness and image of God, God is wholly other from humankind. God does not need our worship in order to be God. So if this is true why then *do* we worship?

It is because worship is for us! Worship is meant to be a vehicle of grace and transformation in our lives. When we worship and begin to see in God the fullness of love, beauty, and mercy, we are then able to hear the invitation to measure all of *our* thoughts and actions against God's hope for the human family.

Research tells us that worship can actually make us better people. And by that I do not mean more *superior* people, but people whose lives reflect a deeper sense of wholeness and resiliency.

Statistically, people who worship in some faith tradition on a regular basis are calmer; they are better able to roll-with-the-punches and handle life's inevitable adversities and they possess a more positive outlook on life.

Going to church is good for you!!

I think this is important now more than ever because there seems to be an immense amount of fear and anxiety in the world around us. We are utterly addicted to anxiety. It has become a way of being in the world. It is killing us.

If we fall behind on our mortgage payments, or learn we have a life threatening disease, or we lose a loved one, hiding in shame or self-protective isolation is the last thing we need. If the current political divisions or global tensions hold us captive, gathering with others to sing, pray and fellowship can ease our pain and fear.

In all of these times, more perhaps than any other, we need community. We need hope and we need the transforming power of communal worship.

In worship we hear stories of God's steadfast love for creation. We are reminded that God will not abandon God's people even when they behave very badly. We are still exhorted to care for and seek justice for those whom society marginalizes.

Through worship our lives are transformed and our relationship with God is tended or restored. This opportunity still exists for us today – right here, right now.

God loves us beyond our imagining. We need support so that transformation is possible. We need each other. We need communal worship.

Worship is where we celebrate that we are embraced by God's love and forgiveness. Worship is where we are given the eyes to see that very same love reflected in the eyes of our neighbors in the pew, the stranger out on the street corner, or even in the face of someone we thought was our enemy.

Both in worship and in life God asks only that we reach out---God asks that we reach out to God and to one another and then fearlessly throw wide the doors to the sanctuary and welcome one another to worship in a safe, loving space where all are welcome and all are children of light.

Grace and Peace, Stephanie+