

It's About God
A Sermon for Every Sunday
Psalm 111

I want to congratulate you on how well you are doing, thus far. You appear, from what I can see from up here, to be functioning quite well in an activity that doesn't come naturally to people like us. You have, for the last thirty or so minutes, been engaged in worshipping God. That's what all the hymns, prayers, readings, getting up and sitting down, kneeling and all the rest has as its goal – to help us worship God.

Worship of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is not easy. For one thing, most of us spend most of our week focused upon ourselves and our needs. We have chores to fulfil, work to be done. There are bills to be paid and appointments to be kept. Sometimes we are burdened by anxiety about our friends and family. At other times, our own concerns overwhelm us.

Perhaps our greatest challenge is that we have been taught, in one way or another, that the point of Sunday worship is *us*.

That attitude is only natural in a culture that teaches us, in so many ways, to focus on ourselves. We're big into self-help. In countless TV shows, we enjoy telling others about our problems.

"Here's the latest no-fail solution to your dieting problems. For only \$14.95 a day, you can know the secret to losing weight!"

"Heartsick over your baldness? You don't have to suffer any longer. Buy this and your troubles are over."

In such a world it's natural that church is presented to you as just another means for getting whatever it is that you think you must have. Worship becomes a primitive, Jewish technique that some people find helpful in getting whatever it that they want.

Notice anything missing from this view of Sunday? *God*.

This is where we come to get our assignments for the week: "OK church. If you really want to be a Christian then here's what you've got to do. Work on your social attitudes. Become more sensitive to the needs of others and then do your part to meet those needs."

Or sometimes church is presented is where we come to solve some problem that besets us. Are you feeling down and depressed? Come to church where you'll receive a boost for the week.

Not know which way to go or which path to take next? Come to church and I, the resident guru on all things related to our life, will spell that out for you in the sermon!

Family problems? Be patient, we'll fix all your family's weaknesses next Sunday.

Unhappy in your work? I'll put six simple steps for having a happier time at work. You copy them down. Go out and do the next steps in the coming week, you'll find that your boss is a nice guy after all.

Notice anything missing in all this advice-giving and busyness? *God.*

That makes all the more remarkable this Sunday's assigned psalm. Did you notice? Psalm 111 is focused entirely, obsessed completely with God. It is as if, in this psalm, the psalmist says, "You have spent the whole week self-concerned, obsessed with your problems, strategies, and plans. Now, for just a brief time, let's all get together and refocus ourselves upon something larger than ourselves. Let's talk about God. Thus the psalmist says,

The works of the Lord are magnificent the mountains, the sparrows, the waves that crash upon the shore, you, me magnificent creations.

God's deeds are majestic and glorious from a "formless void" God created a bountiful world, then God showed us how to live in the words and works of the Commandments and the prophets, forgiving us time and again, giving us Jesus Christ for our salvation, gathering us into God's Church, the Body of Christ.

God is famous for his wondrous works renowned for such a diverse, beautiful world, widely acclaimed for the creation of the world's peoples, constantly constructing a way through when we thought there was no way out.

The Lord is full of mercy and compassion that means that time and again when our love failed, when we turned away and arrogantly followed our own ways rather than God's way, God was merciful, slow to anger, full of steadfast love.

God gives food to those who honor him. If we are looking for evidence of a good God, we don't have to look much further than our dinner table.

God remembers his covenant forever. We didn't have to climb up to God; God climbed down to us and made promises to us: I will be your God and you will be my people. I will stick with you even when you wander from me. I will make you a light to the nations, witnesses to all the world's people of what a great God can do with people like you.

God proclaimed his powerful deeds to his people. We didn't have to come up with God on our own. God came to us, spoke to us, revealed himself to us. We didn't have to attempt to stumble our way forward in the world; God showed up among us and showed us the way. Jesus Christ, a babe born in Bethlehem that grew up and taught a certain truth and walked a definite way is so typical of the way this God preaches to us, in word and deed, letting us in on the truth about God.

God's handiwork is honesty and justice; all God's rules are trustworthy. In a world of lies and liars in high places, where we are bombarded with information and don't know what to believe, who is telling the truth and who is not, God is to be praised as an honest, truth-telling God. There's a lot of injustice in the world; none of it comes from God. God is on the side of the oppressed against the oppressor, working for the victims of injustice.

God sent redemption for his people; God commanded that his covenant last forever. In our sin, we couldn't come to God so God in Jesus Christ came to us. God is a redeeming God, who loves nothing

better than to take our lost cause and make it his, who makes a way when we think there's no way, who transforms sinners and raises the dead.

For all these reasons, no wonder the psalmist prods us to sing, *Holy and awesome is God's name!* To know the truth about God, to get a clear picture of God's character and what God is up to in the world, this is one of the reasons why you are here this morning. It's about God. The psalmist says "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," which is a Bible way of saying that we are not smart until we wise up about who God is and what God does among us. "Fear" is perhaps better rendered as "awe," "adoration" or even "love." That's where true wisdom begins, with God, not with us.

So we gather you on a weekly basis to engage in an activity that doesn't come naturally to us self-centered, self-consumed people. We gather to worship God. We experiment with the countercultural idea that of all the things we need in life what we most need is God. In Sunday worship we confess that most of our most pressing needs in life are insoluble by our own efforts. We need some power greater than our own powers. We've got to have some source of hope beyond our own designs. We need God.

I hope that while you're here you do receive some helpful guidance that you can put into use in the coming week. I hope that if you have come here full of anxiety that you may receive a new sense of peace and well-being.

But mostly I hope that you will meet and be met by God. That eventful meeting is the source of your greatest hope. That's one thing that the church does that occurs nowhere else in our community. That's the gift you most need. *God.*

—William H. Willimon © 2019