

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
June 10 & 11, 2017
Steve Wiens
Wired for Worship
Psalm 122:1**

The Lord be with you. (Congregation replies, “And also with you.”) Think about that phrase. There is no condition to that. The Lord be with you—no matter where you are coming from emotionally, spiritually, no matter what loss you’ve experienced, no matter what mountain top you are on, what valley you’re in, how far you may feel from God right now. When we come to worship together, we hear this beautiful phrase: “The Lord be with you.” And then we return it: “And also with you.” Christians, over the generations, have said that to one another. *The Lord be with you. And also with you.* I love this series “Wired” because it reflects the curiosity, generosity, and creativity of God—that God doesn’t just want to be worshipped one way; that there are so many different ways to connect with God. And this series reflects just five of them—maybe five of the most popular ones, but there are so many other ones and I love that you all are taking time this summer to say *let’s reflect to one another the diversity of God, the creativity of God.* So last week John started off with what it means to connect with God through learning. Today we are going to do worship, and there are lots of different ways to worship, but what I want to focus on primarily is what we do and how we do it when we gather together to worship God at church. And primarily I want to talk about two things. We gather together to remember and to be remembered, because throughout the week, if you’re like me and I know that you are, you get scattered. Your mind gets scattered, your heart gets scattered through different conflicts and brokenness, you feel like...well, some of us are coming in like a cloud of crazy and it’s time to get remembered and get re-put back together in a way that you cannot do by yourself. And then it’s also a time to return, to return to the God who loves us as we are and not as we should be. So worship is about remembering, it’s about returning.

As John said, the last time I preached here was about three years ago. Steve Haines led worship, and afterwards we got down on these steps and you all prayed for us that this idea called Genesis Covenant Church would take root and form. So I want to tell you just a little bit about what has happened because of your prayers, your financial support, and your love. So, at Genesis our vision is that we want to join God’s work of cultivating new beginnings in all of us, everywhere. The word Genesis means beginnings, and so we are always assuming that God is at work, always making all things new, and that our job is to join God in that work. So we meet at the Jewish Community Center in St. Louis Park—because why wouldn’t a church meet in a Jewish Community Center?—and we call ourselves “warmly liturgical.” There are no screens at Genesis; you get a worship bulletin. We are probably the only church plant in the history

of all church plants in the last twenty-five years who say, “Screens? Nah.” We do the Eucharist every week. We follow the Revised Common Lectionary. We follow the seasons of the church calendar, and we made that decision because we wanted to be rooted in something old. We didn’t want to be that church plant that decided they were going to be the first church since the first church to get it right. We knew that we weren’t. We just wanted to play our little part in the great kingdom of God which is huge and vast and rich. CPC is part of that, Genesis is part of that, Our Lady of Grace is part of that, St. Stephens is part of that, and many other churches all around the world. We are about 250-300 people in worship [picture shown]. I put that picture up there because it makes us look really, really full. It was the Christmas Eve service so...it’s like, what’s the best image that I can present to you of what we do? And we are soccer moms, people with full-sleeve tattoos, we’re single dads, we’re grandmas in wheelchairs, and lottsa, lottsa kids and it’s really a beautiful picture of who the body of Christ is up in St. Louis park. And we are going to plant our first church in December of this year. Because we are so committed to joining God’s work of cultivating new beginnings, we decided that we didn’t want too many years to go by before we planted a church. So, we’re not really ready, but there’s a person that’s been assessed by our denomination and found ready and he’s passionate about starting a new Genesis church on the northeast side of Minneapolis, so we’re doing it. It takes a lot of faith to send people out—we’ll talk about that later.

So, Philippians 3. “Whatever it takes,” Paul writes, “I want to be one who lives in the fresh, newness of life of those who are raised from the dead.” Just think about that for a second...like, here’s a guy who’s in prison. He used to persecute followers of Jesus. He knows what it means to follow the law and get an “A”, gold star student—life has changed. He wrote most of the New Testament. If I was him I’d be like, “I don’t know about you, but I did the fresh, newness of life thing. Like...I’m nailing it.” Instead he says, “You know what? Starting today I want to live in the fresh, newness of life.” What kind of person prays that kind of prayer?

So when we gather together we remember and we return. And we have a liturgy—every church has a liturgy—and there are rituals that we do over and over again. Now, the word ritual can be a little off-putting when it gets dead. But Rabbi Lawrence Kushner says this about religious rituals, and I love what he writes: “Religious rituals are a funny sequence of things we do to help us remember that we have forgotten why we have been created, and they gently provide us with the instruments of return. They are ancient techniques for sending us back to everyday life with a childlike sense of wonder.” We repeat things because they help us remember. We start Christmas shopping in September. We have rituals to help us remember what is rich and true and meaningful about God and life because we forget them so easily and so often.

In the Psalms—I’m going to read the first five verses of Psalm 122—we read about one of the most significant rituals in the life of a Jewish person in the first century.

¹⁻² When they said, “Let’s go to the house of God,” my heart leaped for joy.
And now we’re here, O Jerusalem, inside Jerusalem’s walls!
³⁻⁵ Jerusalem, well-built city, built as a place for worship!
The city to which the tribes ascend, all God’s tribes go up to worship,
To give thanks to the name of God—*this* is what it means to be Israel.
[Psalm 122:1-5 from The Message translation]

So once a year, all the grandmas and grandpas, all the aunts and uncles, all the dads and moms and kids and donkeys and little pet sheep that were to become the sacrificial lamb, they all made the journey up to the city of Jerusalem where the temple was. They believed that was where God lived. And they went up there to be forgiven of their sins. The Day of Atonement would happen and then they would walk away from there free, forgiven. And so their hearts leapt with joy, and they actually sang this Psalm as a song. It’s called an ascension song. They would sing that song as they were ascending the hill to Jerusalem. So even the tune—you know how certain songs remind you of certain events in your life—that song reminded them of going to the house of God; that’s why their hearts would leap with joy. They knew that in the house of God they would be remembered, and they would return to who they were. Remember, for most of the history of the children of Israel, they lived in exile, so coming home...it was a big deal.

So for centuries, since the time of Jesus, the church has participated in what is called the four-fold pattern of worship where, when we come together on Sunday mornings, we gather, we do the Word, we listen to the sermon, we read the scriptures, we celebrate the Eucharist, ...and then we are sent out. So let’s look at each one of those movements as ways to remember who we are and return to God. In the gathering time, we hear the Call to Worship, we sing opening songs, we greet each other and we pray, we baptize our kids, and that’s the time when we collect our frazzled selves from the fight that we had in the car on the way in...and then the smiles that we put on our face in the gathering place. “How’s it going?” “Great! How are you?” “Awesome! How are you?” “Super! How are the kids?” “Great! They’re all on the honor roll.” “How’s the house?” “Awesome! I just got done with all the remodeling.” You know what I mean...versus like, “No. Not so much. I lost my job. My husband just died unexpectedly. My kids haven’t talked to me for two years.” I mean—that’s life. When we come to the house of God we don’t have to hide any of that stuff. We carry it in with us and then we place it on the altar, and God says *I know. I know.* We sing songs like, “Your love never fails. It never gives up on me.” And you can sing that in rote, or sometimes that sinks in...like you’re just sitting there and all of a sudden a tear comes to your eye because you think *Oh man, maybe that’s true—that God’s love is like no other love.* God’s love never gives up on you. One of our worship leaders, her name is Kate, was leading worship one time—and she’s had a tough couple of years. Her mom died unexpectedly, she had two really, really hard pregnancies. So she was leading worship, about to go to the Call to Worship, when she sort of just stopped the service and said, “You know, before I do the Call to Worship, I just want to name the fact that I have some deep, dark pain in my life that is really hard. And if that’s true about me, it’s

probably true about you. So before we do the Call to Worship, I want to give you a minute of silence just to name that pain.” And she gave us a minute, and it wasn’t like a church minute that’s like five seconds, it was an actual minute. And I was sitting down there, about to preach, so I was thinking about that, and I remember—I noticed—there was some lingering pain, and I got to give that to God before I got up to preach, and it was powerful. During the gathering time, when we sing our songs and collect ourselves, we are gathered back together, we are remembered from all the disparate scatterings that we have experienced throughout the week, and you can’t do that alone. You don’t get remembered alone. So, all these people you’re sitting next to right now? They’re family. They’re your community. Even if you don’t know them, you’re bound together by something greater than relationship. You’re bound together by the fact that you are the body of Christ—the expression of the body of Christ in this community. You and no other. You reflect Jesus to this part of Edina, and that’s a huge thing to remember. That’s why we gather together.

And then we go to the Word. We hear amazing Children’s Sermons. And we see our kids with cute little rain boots and raincoats...oh my gosh, I almost died over there with the cuteness of the girl that was coming up on the stage. So, how does hearing a sermon or hearing the scriptures help us to remember and return? Now, you have probably heard hundreds of sermons, most of them forgettable. I’ve preached hundreds of sermons, most of them forgettable. And yet, in some mysterious way, when we open our hearts up to the living, active word of God, we remember something. We remember that we are not alone. We remember that our story is situated within a much bigger story. That we’re not just on repeat, with every single day being the same. We’re living in the story of the great restoration of all things. When we read the scriptures we read about treacherous people—I mean, King David? He’s basically the House of Cards. He is amazing and awful, and the Bible has no problem saying how awful he was. And yet, he was a man after God’s own heart. I mean, if you were going to make up a story and one of the main heroes was a guy like David, you would not include some of his...I mean, the terrible murder and adultery and all of those things, yet there’s the Bible. So we can find our part within it, even if we have done some of those things. We can say, “Well, I’m God’s and I can have a new start.” I was sitting with about seventy other people in a rare moment where I didn’t have to lead, and I was being led through the scriptures. And I was going through a really difficult time and I remember journaling that I felt like I was drowning and I didn’t know what to do. And the scripture that I was led into by this woman named Ruth was Isaiah 43:2. And she read this to me:

When you go through deep waters, I will be with you.
When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown.
When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up;
the flames will not consume you. [Isaiah 43:2 NLT]

And in that moment, that was not a theological truth that I was now grounded in... I didn’t learn something...*wow, that’s fascinating. That’s really interesting. I wonder what*

the Hebrew word for fire means. Like, God mysteriously met me because I felt like I was drowning. And it was as if God said to me, “Hey, following me...you’re going to have some times where you feel like you are drowning. You don’t get a ‘Get-Out-of-Drowning’ free card for following me. You’re also going to have times where you feel like you’re being scorched, and I’m not going to pluck you out of that. What I will tell you is I’ll be with you in that, and when you pass through them, you will not die, even if you die. I am with you. I have given you something greater than your small story.”

At Genesis, we say this about the Bible: it really happened, it’s still happening, and it will happen. And then we ask the question: where does our story fit into that story? So that it’s much more interesting than, you know, like an instruction manual for living. Ever heard the Bible explained that way? It’s an instruction manual for living. *Really, where should my kid go to college then? Where do I find that? What verse is...if I lose my job what’s my...I mean, if you want it to be an instruction manual—but that’s like pre-kindergarten level. We can grow into greater understandings of what that is, amen?*

The next movement is the table where we come to receive communion, or the Eucharist. We have chosen to do that every week at Genesis just because we want to lift that up as the centerpiece of the service. The word “Eucharist” means “great thanksgiving” or “great grace” and around here you do it every month where you are given a piece of bread and you say this is the body of Christ, broken for you, and then the cup is the blood of Christ, shed for you. And it can be a ritual that you do over and over again, or it can be a way that you remember that you are the body of Christ in the world. You know that, right? That’s not just a funny way of referring to the church. That means you are **the** body, of Christ, in the world right now. You’re it. Got it? So when you are the body of Christ in the world, the same thing that happened to His body will happen to your body; it will get broken. The blood will get spilled. So when you come back to the table, back to communion, in part you come back to it to put the body back together and pour the blood back in. And in some mysterious way, the Lord meets us there. The Lord is somehow mysteriously present in the Eucharist. And when the Lord says, “Do this in remembrance of Me” He’s not saying, you know, to break out that photo album and go *Oh yeah, man, wasn’t that Last Supper so fun.* Do this, because when you remember Me and what I did, and you start participating in My life, your body is broken and your blood is poured out, remember that it didn’t actually take me down. I mean, it did, but then the Father raised Me up. And the same thing will happen to you. That’s what we’re doing when we come back to the table. I remember, a guy at our church came to me—his kids were going through all kinds of crazy stuff; one kid was going through addiction—and I remember one day right before the Eucharist I saw him and I asked, “How’s it going? How is your child that is going through addiction?” And this guy is a high power executive dude...looks good, great guy... he just fell into my arms and started weeping. His body is being broken because of some of the ways in which he is trying to love his kids through some horrid things. And what do you say to that guy? Like, *Chin up! God won’t give you anything you can’t handle!* No, I actually just held him and he cried for a while, and then we took the Eucharist. That’s what we

can offer people. This is the broken body of Christ, put back together, given for you. This is the blood of Christ, a cup of salvation. Christ shed His blood for you. I can't solve your problem, but you can meet God in it.

And lastly, the sending. You know, the benediction—where you kind of check your watch and you think about your reservation that you made for lunch—the signal that the service is over. It's actually the time when we remember that we are sent out into the world. We go out into the world in grace and peace, to join God's reconciling work in the world. It's not the ending; it's the beginning of our mission. Joining God's mission—the "Imago Dei"—the reconciliation of all things. We become peacemakers in the world...like this Nicaraguan team that's going out to be peacemakers there and to meet some needs. And when you go into your place of business, and maybe it's even your home that feels like a conflict zone right now, you're being sent out, having remembered who you are. *I am a child of God, forgiven by Jesus, given gifts. I've been built back up so I can go back out, at least for another week.* Maybe that's our shelf life...that's why we gather together every week. A week is probably too long to be totally honest. In a week we'll gather back together, but man, between this Sunday and that next Sunday, I'm going to be the body of Christ in the world, and it's going to sometimes feel like drowning, it's going to sometimes feel like getting scorched, but I'm being sent out into the world to be the body of Christ and I'm not sent out alone, because at church I gathered, I remembered, I received the words of God. They were more than just learning, it was life to me, and then I partook of the very body and blood of Christ. And then I was sent out. I participated in the movement of worship so that I can live a life of worship. That's the fresh, newness of life that Philippians talks about.

So you, CPC, have just sent out the Table into south Minneapolis, just really a few miles away. You have done the really good and hard work of sending. And sending is always a mixed bag, isn't it? Hard, beautiful, costly. You start to remember...*remember when this thing first started? Remember the hopes and dreams?* Even if it didn't turn out exactly the way you thought, you can send out in grace and peace, believing that God is always at work, always making all things new. You can release with grace and peace. And CPC, I've known you long enough now, to know that part of your legacy is to be sending—a sending church. You've sent out lots and lots of people: Tony Kroening, Kurt Vickman, Brad Jackson, and now Matt Moberg and Debbie Manning. There have been many others, and I know there is a cost to doing this. Believe me, as we send out people to plant a church coming up, it's going to be a mixed bag. As a senior pastor, when you let go and you release people, you think *Yes, this is totally God! This is God's will. Go, go, go! It's amazing, it's amazing!* Then you go back to your little prayer closet, and you bawl because really good people said that they would go, and you didn't think that *they* were going to go. And Jesus says, "When you go through the river, it's going to be really scary, but you're not going to drown. Remember that last time you went through the river? Have you forgotten so soon? You didn't drown. When you go through the fire, it's going to be hot, but you're not going to get burned. Remember when you went through that?" *Oh yeah.* So that's what we do when we worship, right? We hear

the stories of people who went through the fire and didn't get burned. People that went through the river and didn't drown. That's what we're doing when we gather together, we remember so that we can return to the God who made us, the God that is making all things new. Amen?

So, because we aren't doing the Eucharist today, I wanted to end by reading an African canticle together to remind us that we aren't the only people in the world. We're going to read this together because we're not the center of the world here in the Twin Cities. There are churches in the Middle East and Africa and Asia...all over the world, gathering together to remember and return. So let's say it together:

Leader:

All you big things, bless the Lord.

Unison:

Mount Kilimanjaro and Lake Victoria,

Leader:

The Rift Valley and the Serengeti Plain,

Unison:

Fat Baobabs and shady mango trees,

Leader:

All eucalyptus and tamarind trees,

Unison:

Bless the Lord. Bless and extol God forever and ever.

Leader:

All you tiny things, bless the Lord.

Unison:

Busy black ants and hopping fleas,

Leader:

Wriggling tadpoles and mosquito larvae,

Unison:

Flying locusts and water drops,

Leader:

Pollen dust and tsetse flies,

Unison:

Millet seeds and dried dagaa, bless the Lord. Praise and extol God forever and ever. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.