

**Legacy Sermon Series**  
**“A Worshipping Church”**  
**Psalm 145**  
**Sept. 25, 2022**  
**Rev. Joy W. Laughridge**

Today we are finishing our Legacy sermon series. We’ve been remembering our past, giving thanks and praise to God for faithfully leading and sustaining LPC for 70 years, and listening to hear what Jesus has to say to us about living out our legacy in this season of our life together as Lakewood Presbyterian Church. This morning our focus is on worship.

If you had a chance to read the church history that was prepared for the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, you read this in the opening paragraph. “Seventy years ago, in the year of our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred Fifty-two, Harry S. Truman was president of the United States of America. Inflation was not a threat, but a reality. Prices continued to boom. But people were optimistic and looked to the future. *Divine worship was not to be forgotten in finding the full life.*” I love that sentence, “divine worship was not to be forgotten in finding the full life.” It’s a reminder that the truest and fullest life includes worshipping the Creator we were made to worship, and it’s a reminder that this is why our church was started and why it is still here. Without Divine worship, we would be a social organization or a service organization, but we wouldn’t be a church. We are a church, though, and as a church, LPC exists to be a place that bears witness to God’s presence and activity in the world and to tell the story of God’s saving work in Jesus Christ. We exist to be a place where people have the opportunity to connect with God and receive the spiritual nourishment that is offered through Word and Sacrament. We exist to show the world what life in God’s kingdom looks like, and we exist to be a place where people have the opportunity to have their lives formed into the likeness of Jesus. And all of that is rooted and sustained in worship.

For all its life, LPC has maintained a focus on and a commitment to worship and one of the important ways that this church has done that has been through music. The choir loft was an important feature that was included in the design for this sanctuary, and I’ve been told that it was Charles Benz who wanted the choir up top and actually hidden from sight. I was told that the reason for that was because he wanted God to remain the focal point in worship, and if the choir was visible, one might find themselves contemplating the hat worn by a choir member rather than contemplating the majesty and glory of God. So, in the early years, the choir was to be heard and not seen, but their ministry was valued and important and that has stayed true over the years. There has always been a commitment to investing financial resources in music directors and musicians, and like this church has a history of faithful pastors, this church also has a history of faithful and talented music directors. Those directors have helped develop and expand the music program over the years with bell choir, and children’s choir, and special singing groups. I hear you speak fondly of past choir directors, especially those that were with you during the last 30 years—Mike Coldwell and Rodney Cleveland, and, of course, we love Tony. Today is a bittersweet day for us as it is Tony’s last with us as our choir director. I have loved working with Tony. William Wilson told me a joke that Richard Caldwell told him when he was here for the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary that goes like this. What’s the difference between a terrorist and a choir director? You can negotiate with a terrorist. Tony has been wonderful to work with, and he has led our music program with enthusiasm, creativity, flexibility, and love and he has helped us be a church that celebrates, remembers, and proclaims God and God’s good news through beautiful and inspiring music. We are going to miss him and his gifts and our worship won’t be the same without Tony, but in times of transition that can cause us to feel some anxiety, it’s important to know that we can continue to be a church that worships well, and worships well with music, even as our music leadership changes. Having a strong Music Director is helpful, and I can tell you that the Search Committee has been diligent in searching for a candidate who has the gifts and skills to build on our existing strengths and then advance the music ministry of this church, but having a good

music program and being worshippers who worship, as Jesus said, “in Spirit and in truth,” are not necessarily the same thing. Worship that glorifies God and makes space for Jesus to be revealed is a love response of the heart and it can be offered with or without special talents. It is true that if when you sing it sounds more like a noise than a tune, if you offer that noise as a true expression of love and praise, God takes delight in your noise and is worshipped.

Today and in the future we want to remember the reason that our church was planted and we want to remain devoted to our worshipping purpose. One of the quickest ways to become irrelevant and ineffective as witnesses to God and to what God is doing in the world is to forget that we exist as a church for the purpose of pointing to and celebrating God’s presence and God’s gracious and redemptive acts in Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, it is all too easy to make things about ourselves, and churches and Christians sometimes veer off toward idolatry without even realizing that it has happened. Church leaders that started off with a true desire to faithfully lead a worshipping community, have gotten sidetracked when they discovered that their charisma and personality allowed them to become the center of people’s attention and affections and Jesus went to the back burner. Congregations become entangled in nasty conflicts that center on personal preferences around music styles or service times, and the true spirit of worship is lost. Programs can go from being God-honoring, fruit-bearing ministries, to pet projects that get protected not for Jesus’s sake but for the sake of egos. Of course, we can shake our heads when we hear the stories of disgraced church leaders or when we hear of other churches that are buried in conflict and problems, but if we think we are immune to being tempted in these ways, we shouldn’t. Even Jesus was tempted to grasp for his own power and glory rather than surrender himself completely to God and devote himself to God in worship. In Matthew 4, we read how he was led into the wilderness and tempted by the Devil who took him to a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world. **‘All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.’** <sup>10</sup> **Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan! for it is written, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”’**

One of the points that is often made about the story of Jesus’s temptation in the wilderness is that Jesus uses Scripture to resist the Devil, and that point is so often highlighted because it is a good strategy for resisting temptation. If the temptation that we are talking about today is the temptation to neglect true worship because of our tendency toward idolatry, then Scripture- reading it, meditating on it, memorizing it, even singing it- can definitely help us with that. The Bible tells us about God. It tells the story of how God has acted in history, and it describes God’s nature and attributes. The Psalm that we read this morning is a poem of praise that God’s people used in worship and it speaks to who God is. It’s an acrostic poem and each line begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The acrostic form is like a way of saying that God is everything from a to z. The beginning and the end. The Alpha and the Omega. The poem is also like a love song for and about God. I was watching an episode of the Jeffersons last night and Louise was upset because George wanted to buy her something for Valentine’s Day, but she wanted something romantic. She wanted him to write a love song for her. This Psalm sounds like the kind of love song that Louise wanted George to write for her. Tell me from your heart everything that you love and admire about me – everything that is wonderful about me. We heard the Psalmist say I will extol you, my God and King. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised. God’s greatness is unsearchable. On the glorious splendor of your majesty and on your wondrous works I will meditate. The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed. They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness and sing aloud of your righteousness. The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, the Lord is good to all. The Lord is faithful. The Lord upholds those who are falling down. The Lord is just in all his ways and kind in all his doings. It goes on and on with one declaration after another about how wonderful the Lord is.

When we read this Psalm of praise it fills our minds with a vision and with the truth about the God who is worthy of all worship, and that is something that we need to help us remain faithful and devoted worshippers. There is so much out there that can easily fill our minds. All of the information that we are

taking in constantly from our computer screens, and phone screens, and TV screens. All the talking that we hear on the radio as we drive from place to place. All of the conversations that we play and replay in our minds. Anxious thoughts, and our to-do lists, and our grocery lists. With all of these things filling our minds, it can be easy to forget what isn't right in front of us, and I think this is one of the big reasons that it can be easy to slip into idolatry and to neglect worshipping God- because God is invisible, and as the saying goes, out of sight out of mind. In Colossians 3:2, believers are encouraged to remain mindful of the spiritual Truth that we can't see with our eyes. "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth," the verse says. Returning to Scripture again and again in prayer, and in times of private worship, and when we gather as a church for worship is a discipline and a means of grace that helps us keep our hearts and minds focused on the goodness and worthiness of God. It keeps us filled up with an awareness of God that lifts us out of self-centeredness and helps us live God-centered lives.

Today and in the future, this is what we want to hold on to – a life together that is centered on worshipping God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God has richly blessed us in the past with gifts and leadership that have allowed us to do that in a special way through the ministry of music, and even though we are saying goodbye to one of those beloved and gifted leaders today, I believe that God intends to continue to bless us with more good music leadership and the ability to worship well with music. I do believe that, but even if we lost every musical talent and gift today, we can still be a church that worships and bears witness to Jesus Christ. Many things may change. Things will change, but Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. If we draw near to him, and listen to him, and keep our eyes fixed on him God will be glorified, and known, and lifted up in an ongoing way through the ministry of this church.

It has been good to take time this month to celebrate and remember the story of where we came from and to count our blessings and give thanks to God for the years of meaningful mission and ministry. There is inspiration in our past – not to recreate the past- but to remain committed to Jesus and the ministry to which he calls us now. In our generation, if we remember our purpose- to give glory to God and to tell God's story- the LPC story will go on being written, and our faithfulness and the fruit of our ministry can be an inspiration to generations to come. Amen.