

# Sunday, June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020

High River Christian Reformed Church

## Call to Worship *from* Psalm 84: 1 – 4 (ESV)

How lovely is your dwelling place,  
O LORD of hosts!  
My soul longs, yes, faints  
for the courts of the LORD;  
my heart and flesh sing for joy  
to the living God.  
Even the sparrow finds a home,  
and the swallow a nest for herself,  
where she may lay her young,  
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,  
my King and my God.  
Blessed are those who dwell in your house,  
ever singing your praise!

Grace to you, and peace,  
from God the Father,  
and the Lord Jesus Christ,  
in the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

## Scripture Reading: John 4: 1 – 26 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John <sup>2</sup> (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), <sup>3</sup> he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. <sup>4</sup> And he had to pass through Samaria. <sup>5</sup> So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup> Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

<sup>7</sup> A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." <sup>8</sup> (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) <sup>9</sup> The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) <sup>10</sup> Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." <sup>11</sup> The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" <sup>12</sup> Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." <sup>13</sup> Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup> but whoever drinks of the water

that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”<sup>15</sup> The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.”

<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.”<sup>17</sup> The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’;<sup>18</sup> for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”<sup>19</sup> The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.”<sup>20</sup> Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.”<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.”<sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.”<sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.”<sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”<sup>25</sup> The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.”<sup>26</sup> Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.”

And this is the Word of Jesus, he who is called Christ, not only to the woman at the well, but also to all of us. May God add his blessing to the reading of his word.

## Worth-ship in Truth

John 4: 1 – 26

### Introduction:

On an unremarkable New Mexico day in October, 1977, Maria Morales Rubio was making breakfast for her family, starting, as always, with homemade fried flour tortillas. But when she laid the third tortilla on the counter to add the ingredients, she noticed a small but distinct burn pattern about the size of a quarter, which looked to her like the face of Jesus. Now when I read these things, I always wonder how people know what the face of Jesus actually looks like, and one reporter from the time claimed that he thought it looked more like the face of former heavyweight champion boxer Leon Spinks; but Maria was convinced that it was Jesus, and immediately sought corroboration from her daughter who felt the same way.

Of course, they knew right away that this was no ordinary tortilla, so they preserved it, calling eventually for the local priest to come and have a look. Evidently, he was more skeptical—maybe he too was a boxing fan—but blessed it anyway and even mentioned the incident to a couple of others after he returned to his home. As the family has told the story, by that afternoon, there were more than a hundred people waiting in line for their first look at Jesus of the tortilla, and hundreds eventually turned to thousands and even tens of thousands, as the tortilla was framed so that the face of Jesus appeared above a swatch of cotton intended to make it look like it was floating somewhere near the pearly gates. All of this can be verified online. Movies have been made, and interviews done with the family.

Now I'm not telling this story to mock anyone; not the woman who made the tortilla, or the family whose life definitely improved in the aftermath, or even the people who drove out into the desert to see it, or to pray to it, and to hope for a miracle of their own. I just tell the story to illustrate a point from last week. As someone has said, and I think the first instance of this may have been no less than Thomas Edison, although it's hard to say—"People are incurably religious," even those who claim not to be so. Of course, you can probably fathom Edison's atheistic world view just by his choice of the word "incurably". So, he wasn't saying this in a positive way, but I think it's true.

For instance, it's funny to me (in a sad, ironic way) how many people will use the name, "Jesus Christ" to curse, when many of those same people would claim that they don't believe. So, if we give them the benefit of the doubt and assume that they are not simply profaning the holy name to deliberately offend anyone who does believe that Jesus truly is the Christ, then what are they saying? They may as well curse in the name of Captain America or Donald Duck. If you don't believe in the reality of either Jesus Christ or Donald Duck, then what possible difference could it make? But even some professed unbelievers will still apologize for their language when they misuse the name of Jesus, or of God.

We see that same phenomenon in the story of the Jesus tortilla. People are indeed (at least to some extent) incurably religious, so much so that some will even worship before a thumb-print sized burn mark on a flour tortilla if they think they see a face there.

As I said last Lord's Day, that's why, we need books (and sermons) about worship (prayer too!) because both are things that come quite naturally to some, but they are also things which every believer can and must learn, and in which we can, indeed, grow. When the disciples came to Jesus saying, "Lord, teach us to pray..." Jesus taught them to pray. He didn't say, "Hey guys, you don't need to be taught, just go forth and pray." He taught them to pray, and **we** know this because that incident was recorded for us **in a book** by some of those who participated in the event, so that Jesus' teaching about prayer (and about a lot of other things, including worship) could be passed along to people who were not there to participate on that occasion.

He taught about worship as well, in John chapter 4, as saw a couple of weeks ago. When the woman at the well asked him, "Where are we supposed to worship, here on Mount Gerazim, or in Jerusalem?" Jesus did not say, "It doesn't matter, as long as you worship someone, somewhere, somehow." He answered her question, and he taught her about worship when he said,

<sup>23</sup> ...the hour is coming, and is now here,

remember that, "is now here..."

when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." John 4:23-24 (ESV)

## The Hour is Now Here

Now, before we go on, think for just a minute about that expression, "...is now here..." It could be taken in a fairly ambiguous way, and that's OK. I won't be too dogmatic about this. But it would also be taken in a very specific way. "The hour is coming **and is now here...**" Well, what was "there" at Jacob's well in Samaria at that specific moment? More particularly, "Who" was there with the woman at Jacob's well in Samaria? What was happening at that specific moment that might have prompted Jesus to say, "The hour is coming and **is now here...**"?

Of course, this is one of those fantastic Sunday School questions which can be asked to a room full of students who aren't listening attentively, and when one is called upon to answer, and hazards the guess, "Jesus," in this case, he'd be right. Jesus was there. Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the Living God was what was happening at that specific moment to cause him to say, "The hour is coming, **and is now here.**" See, the Father isn't seeking people to worship in a someone, somewhere, somehow mode. He is seeking people who will worship Him in spirit and truth, and Jesus said on another occasion, "I am...the truth." Actually,

<sup>6</sup> ... "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6 (ESV)

So, worship "in spirit and truth" is worship that is offered through the one who is "the way, the truth, and the life..." It's worshipped offered before the Father, through Jesus Christ, His Son. And this is one of those moments when we would do well to remember that when the gathered church is the body of Christ. When we worship God as, in, and through the body of Christ, we worship in spirit and truth.

This is not to deny the idea that all of life is worship. Not at all. We **can** (and should!) worship God any time, wherever we are and whatever we're doing. As a matter of fact, if we are not worshipping God in and through whatever we are doing at any particular moment, it's at least questionable whether or not we should be doing it. We can worship God in our work. We can worship God in our recreation. I am certain that this is a very biblical and reformed idea. I am equally certain that when the Bible puts this forward, it does not mean to set the idea that all of life is worship in opposition or contrast to the "assembling of ourselves together" for worship. Having said that, this is one of those ideas to which we will come back later in the series, so, stay tuned for more.

## If There are True Worshippers...

For today, consider this. When Jesus said,

...the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. John 4:23 (ESV)

there is an implication. More than that. It follows logically that if there are "true worshippers", then there are also false worshippers.

One version of this involves the worship of false gods. In ancient times, people worshipped gods and goddesses who required human sacrifice. An article on Sacrifice among the Aztecs reads,

When the Spanish conquistador[s]...arrived in the Aztec capital...in 1521, they described witnessing a grisly ceremony. Aztec priests, using razor-sharp obsidian blades, sliced open the chests of sacrificial victims and offered their still-beating hearts to the gods. They then tossed the victims' lifeless bodies down the steps of the towering Templo Mayor.

Reading these accounts hundreds of years later, many historians dismissed the 16th-century reports as wildly exaggerated propaganda...But in 2015 and 2018, archeologists working at the...excavation site in Mexico City discovered proof of widespread human sacrifice among the Aztecs—none other than the very skull towers and skull racks that conquistadors had described in their accounts. [www.history.com/news/aztec-human-sacrifice-religion](http://www.history.com/news/aztec-human-sacrifice-religion)

We might want to keep this in mind if we are ever tempted to think that all forms of worship (and by extension, all religions) are equally valid approaches to the One True God. This too. Some of the gods of the Canaanites encountered by (and eventually worshipped by) Old Covenant Israel required people to throw newborn infants alive into the fire. 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 11, verses 6 – 8 tells us that even

<sup>6</sup> ...Solomon [King David's son] did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done. <sup>7</sup> ...Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. <sup>8</sup> And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods. 1 Kings 11:6–8 (ESV)

The idea that all truth is relative and that every individual's version of truth is as valid as any other individual's becomes a bit hard to swallow when you think of ancient pagans tossing newborn infants alive into fiery furnaces. I'd like to think that humanity had moved beyond such idolatry, but then I think of the 19 million+ preborn children sacrificed through abortion this year alone (since January 2020)... and to what gods? Convenience; autonomy; choice? As Pastor and Author John MacArthur wrote,

False gods may be either material objects or mythical supernatural beings. Material gods may be worshiped even without the conscious thought that they are deities. Job 31: 24 – 28 says, <sup>i</sup>

<sup>24</sup> "If I have made gold my trust or called fine gold my confidence, <sup>25</sup> if I have rejoiced because my wealth was abundant or because my hand had found much, <sup>26</sup> if I have looked at the sun when it shone, or the moon moving in splendor, <sup>27</sup> and my heart has been secretly enticed, and my mouth has kissed my hand, <sup>28</sup> this also would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges, for I would have been false to God above. Job 31:24–28 (ESV)

An old advertising campaign said, "You've come a long way, baby," but with 19 million and counting dead from abortion, maybe we haven't really come that far after all.

## More Subtle Forms of False Worship

But there are other, more subtle forms of false worship. We can worship false gods in contravention of the First Commandment. We can also attempt to worship the true God in a false way, in contravention of the second. In Exodus 32,

<sup>1</sup> When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, “Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” Exodus 32:1 (ESV)

What comes next demonstrates how subtly false worship can begin. Aaron

<sup>4</sup> ...received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” <sup>5</sup> When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a feast **to the LORD.**” Exodus 32:4–5 (ESV)

So, the worship of the golden calf was not quite as blatant idolatry as that into which Solomon fell when he made an idol to Molech for his foreign wives. The people did worship around a golden calf, but they proclaimed it to be a feast to the Lord—to Yahweh—to the God who brought them up out of Egypt. The thing is, when God prohibited the making of images, he was not merely prohibiting the making of idols that would bear the names of other so-called “gods”, he was also prohibiting the making of any image to which someone would ascribe his name. In Deuteronomy 4, Moses said,

<sup>15</sup> “...watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw no form on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, <sup>16</sup> beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves, in the form of any figure... Deuteronomy 4:15–16 (ESV)

It should go without saying, but probably doesn't, that we need to be just as careful about giving God a form in the imaginations and thoughts of our hearts. God created us in his image. We are not to attempt to recreate him in our own. We are not to make any image, physical or imaginary, of anything, as an attempt to aid us in the worship of the Living God; rather, we are to worship the true God in spirit and truth. We are to worship the One True God in the manner which he prescribes for us in His holy word, as we see in Leviticus chapter, which speaks of yet another false attempt to worship the true.

In that chapter, Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Moses' brother Aaron, the high priest of God's people, decide to go into the temple and make an offering before the Lord. The thing is, they had not been commanded to make this offering. Whatever their motive may have been, they were acting out of their own initiative and creativity to “do something” for God which God had not commanded them to do. We read in verses 1 and 2,

<sup>1</sup> ...each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. <sup>2</sup> And...

(just in case we were wondering whether or not this was that big a deal)

fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.  
Leviticus 10:1–2 (ESV)

As one commentator has written, “They were young men, excited, well-meaning, perhaps...but they disobeyed...” and since worship, as we saw last week is “worth-ship”, it is ascribing to the Lord “the glory **due** his name”, we should not think that the God who made the heavens and the earth has a casual attitude toward this. In Scripture, it’s clear that he does not.

### More Subtle Still...

So, we can worship false gods, we can attempt to worship the true God in a false form, and we can attempt to worship the true God in a manner he has not commanded. To the extent that we engage in any of these practices, we are false worshippers, not the true worshippers described by Jesus in our text this morning. But, just one more thing. We can also worship the true God, in a manner that he commands, but without the heart attitude—without the spirit—that he requires.

The first act of false worship ever recorded for us in the Bible falls into this category.  
Genesis 4, verses 2 – 5,

<sup>2</sup> ...Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. <sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, <sup>4</sup> and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup> but for Cain and his offering he had no regard... Genesis 4:2–5 (ESV)

Over the years, much has occasionally been made of the fact that Abel brought a sacrifice that involved blood, and Cain did not, and this has been put forward for the reason behind the Lord’s lack of regard “for Cain and his offering...” I won’t say that such is impossible, but there’s no indication of it either here or anywhere else in Scripture, and later on, God specifically commanded his people to bring bloodless offerings of “the fruit of the ground,” so it seems unlikely. I think the real answer is stated simply in Hebrews 11, verse 4:

<sup>4</sup> **By faith** Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. Hebrews 11:4 (ESV)

See, Abel evidently brought his offering in faith. Cain did not. Abel worshipped *not only* in truth, but also in spirit, and God commended him “by accepting his gifts.” And “**through his faith**, though he died, he still speaks.”

So, Genesis 4, with Hebrews 11, presents for us the most subtle form of all false worship. Worshipping the True God, in a true way, with a false heart—a heart that does not come into his presence in and by faith, and we will have much more to say about this later on, but simply (for now), this is a heart that does not come to God in and through Christ alone.

<sup>24</sup> “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4:24 (ESV)

<sup>6</sup> ... “I am the way, [said Jesus,] **and the truth**, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6 (ESV)

This is why we do not tailor the worship service to the tastes and desires of unbelievers, because the service (the *latreuo*, the liturgy) is worship, and unbelievers—people who do not come to the Father through Christ alone—by definition, **cannot** worship. When God confronted Cain after the murder of his brother, he said, “The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground!” and, according to Hebrews 11, “through his faith...he still speaks”, and we would do well listen.

We would do well to listen, first of all, and to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith—to see if we are truly in Christ, because it is only through faith in Christ that we can come to God for anything, never mind to worship him. To worship God in spirit and truth, we are called to turn away from sin and self—to repent—and trust in Christ. As we saw a couple of weeks ago, after her encounter with Jesus at the well of Sychar,

<sup>39</sup> Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.” <sup>40</sup> So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. <sup>41</sup> And many more believed because of his word. <sup>42</sup> They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, **and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.**” John 4:39–42 (ESV)

And if you are listening to me this morning, and have never come to know that Jesus, the Christ, is indeed the Savior of the world, then he is commanding you right now to repent and believe, that you might truly worship him, as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable in his sight.

And for us who do believe, we too need to hear the voice and the blood of Abel as it speaks to us through faith. Let me close with the words of Pastor John MacArthur this morning.

Perhaps the greatest need in all of Christendom is for a clear understanding of the biblical teaching about worship. When the church fails to worship properly, it fails in every other area...

Much of the world offers false worship, the kind of worship that focuses...on material things, on ritual or form, or even on divine blessings: or the kind of worship that follows a self-styled form or demonstrates a wrong attitude. God will not accept it. The Bible is explicit on that.

We must seek a fresh understanding of worship. God has commanded it. Our ministry depends on it. It is crucial to our relationship to Him and our testimony in this world. We cannot afford to ignore it. Too much is at stake. <sup>ii</sup>

Because, in the words of Jesus,

<sup>23</sup> ...the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship him **must worship in spirit and truth.**” John 4:23–24 (ESV)

## **Parting Words** *from* **1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5: 13 – 22 (ESV)**

Be at peace among yourselves...admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.

## **Benediction** *from* **1st Thessalonians 5: 23 – 28 (ESV)**

Now may the God of peace himself  
sanctify you completely,  
and may your whole spirit and soul and body  
be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.  
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

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<sup>i</sup> John MacArthur Jr., *The Ultimate Priority* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983) p. 7,

<sup>ii</sup> *ibid*, p. 12