

“Experiential Worshiper: Mind Worship – Loving God with Your Thoughts”

Rev. Perry J. Fruhling, St. Mark’s Lutheran Church, 18 May 2008

Grace to you and peace... Yesterday was an amazing day for our larger church. Four members of St. Mark’s attended the Southeastern Iowa Synod Assembly where we elected a new bishop, Michael Burk, a native of Grinnell, Iowa. He has most recently been serving in the ELCA as Executive for Worship and is responsible for organizing our new red hymnal. As he was elected, he said these words: “The church makes a decision, but the Spirit of God makes a bishop.” We were also blessed to have our choir at the banquet celebration for Bishop Hougen’s retirement. He would share how his faith was formed at St. Mark’s and we said to him through an Allen Koepke anthem, *“Well Done, Thou Good and Faithful Servant.”* God has given us leaders who are learned and wise and has given them the gift of discernment. And today we celebrate in worship, that God gifts us in the same ways...

The brain is an amazing thing: billions of neuro-connections firing off countless electrical synapses per second, more powerful than the world’s greatest super computers. The brain can do incredible things, but the mind is even greater than the brain. God created us to be thinkers, not just machines that process information, but people who can ponder mysteries and appreciate meaning that transcends simple facts. Our mind can receive truth that gives us access to God himself and changes us. Jesus said, *“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”***(John 8:32)**. When we open our mind to God incredible things can happen. No wonder Jesus included the mind as one of the four food groups of worship, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your MIND, and with all your strength.”***(Mark 12:30)** If we want to worship God fully we need to learn how to love him with our mind.

Have you ever driven home from a familiar place and wondered, “how did I just get here?” Your mind occupied by other matters – maybe the radio or things you need to get done or stresses in your life – only to discover you’ve arrived home and can’t remember stopping at lights, taking exits, passing vehicles? That’s called mindless driving! Too often we come to worship on autopilot, say the words, sing the songs, go through the motions of worship... but our minds are not engaged. Mindless worship is not really worship at all... we can lift our hands, cross ourselves, but we’re not really worshipping if our mind is not involved, and we miss a life-changing encounter with God.

If you’re not convinced, watch and see what the absent-minded professor learned about how our mind can affect our relationships in the movie, “Flubber.” [\(Play clip\)](#) The simple truth is you cannot love someone if you’re not willing to focus your attention on

them, if you are not willing to engage them with your mind. When you come to worship God are you intentionally loving him with your mind? If not, maybe that is why worship seems rote and unfulfilling. Maybe that's why your life isn't changing the way you want it to be changing. The truth is there, but if your mind is absent you will not experience the freedom the Spirit of God is offering to you. MindWorship means intentionally focusing your full attention on God in worship and refusing to just go through the motions. Let's see what Paul tells us about MindWorship . . .

Romans 12:1-2 begins by giving us a powerful picture of genuine worship, *"And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice – the kind he will accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask?"* The New Revised Standard Version translates, "what God has done for you" as "by the mercies of God." Worship does not begin with us, it begins with God. Remember our definition of authentic biblical worship: first God comes to us with his grace and truth. God is the initiator of worship because he is the one who first loves us. Then we respond to his grace by giving ourselves back to him. The intersection of these two dynamics is an authentic encounter with God. Incidentally this is how Martin Luther defined worship, "Our dear Lord speaks to us through his holy Word, and we respond to him through our prayer and praise." This is exactly how Paul describes worship in v. 1, "by the mercies of God" God comes to us with his grace in Jesus. So we are empowered to respond: "Present your bodies as living sacrifice." last week we talked about the importance of StrengthWorship, giving concrete outward expression to our inward love for God. Now Paul uses the body to describe the whole person, because the body is where the heart, soul, and mind are located. When he says "present your body," he means we are to give our whole self, all that we are, all four food groups of worship: the heart: an act of our will... the soul: our feelings... the mind: our intentional thoughts... and the strength: physical expressions of our body.

Paul calls us to present our whole self as a "living sacrifice." In the Old Testament, offering sacrifice was the central expression of worship. Now Paul says, instead of offering a dead animal, offer yourself to him. You are the sacrifice, not to be killed, but to live. See, worship is not just what goes on in this building, it is meant to be a whole way of life. What you do every day, how you live 24-7 is part of your worship. If your life Monday through Saturday has nothing to do with what you do here on Sunday, you are not yet fully worshipping God. He is not saying worship is to be strictly intellectual, that would be to only eat from one of the four food groups. Our mind is to be an important ingredient along with our body, our emotions, and our will. As Paul explained to the Corinthian Christians who got out of balance in worship by focusing on the more dramatic expressions: *"For if I pray in tongues, my spirit is praying, but I don't understand what I am saying. Well then, what shall I do? I will do both. I will pray in the spirit, and I will pray in words I understand. I will sing in the*

spirit, and I will sing in words I understand.” (1 Corinthians 14:14-15) You see God wants both; he wants us to open up to all that he has for us.

What happens when we learn to worship God in this way? Paul goes on in **Romans 12:2**: *“Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is...”* Instead of allowing the values and priorities of the world around us to mold and shape us, when we are worshiping God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength, something different happens, we begin to be shaped from the inside out. We are transformed rather than conformed. That is why we describe worship as a life-changing encounter with God.

Today we honor graduates who have reached a point in their education where they are being conferred a degree. They have worked hard in High School, College, or Graduate School to have a certain level of knowledge that has engaged the mind. The mind is a gift to you from God. Now God is calling you to take that knowledge and transform the world, just as God transforms you.

Notice where Paul describes this transformation taking place, v. 2: *“changing the way you think.”* As you learn to open yourself to God, engaging your body, emotions, will, and mind, something happens. You start to think differently, you start to see things the way God does. The truth of his Word starts to guide your life and you are able to discern the will of God. Paul says as you learn to love God with all that you are, including your mind, you will begin to know God’s will. This is what he means when he tells the Corinthians, *We have the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16)*.

Are you on autopilot when you come to worship, are you easily distracted by other things, find yourself going through the motions? Here’s someone who is truly engaged in singing in worship (play video clip of Lulu). When you first hear her, for a second you think she really means it, then you realize she doesn’t even know what she is singing. How often do we end up doing exactly the same thing in worship? We sing the songs, we say the prayers, we listen to the message, but our mind is somewhere else!

How can we worship God more completely with our mind? In a society with cultural ADD, our collective attention span is shortened. We need to train our mind to focus on God in worship. That’s why we often use creative means to engage different parts of the brain that learn in different ways. When we ask you to open your Bible and read it while we preach, it is to help you focus on the Scriptures. We encourage you to bring own Bible so you can write in it, which also helps your mind engage. There’s a blank space on the back of the bulletin. If you hear something meaningful that strikes

you, try writing it down. During the special music read words so you can connect the beauty of the music in your soul with the meaning of the song in your mind.

Take out the Recipe Card in your program. If you didn't get one just raise your hand or ask an usher. On the back you will see some passages of Scripture. I encourage you to take that Card home, pick the Scripture that speaks to you the most, and start to memorize it. You will be amazed what happens to your mind when you start to fill it with God's Word—your mind will start to be transformed, renewed!

As important as it is to engage God with our minds in worship, it is equally important to remember you can't fit God into an intellectual box. God is infinite and so by definition he is impossible to fully comprehend. Today is Trinity Sunday. Have you ever tried to explain the Trinity to someone? You can't explain it because it defines God and God can't be contained in our thoughts—after all, that is why we worship him! Paul expresses it this way: *"For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God . . . For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength."* (**1 Corinthians 1: 18, 25**) Trying to comprehend the infinite God with your finite mind is like trying to contain a river with a cup. Worship is about opening the cup of your mind, letting the Spirit of God flow into your thoughts and overflow your comprehension. As you learn to do that you will find yourself loving with more and more of your mind and you will be transformed!

Do you have the Recipe Card with the scriptures handy? As we sing the next song ask God to clear away everything in us that is not of him, and to fill us with his presence. As distractions come to your mind during the song, just imagine yourself setting them off to the side on a shelf where you can come back to them later if you need to. I invite you just to sit and reflect and listen for whatever the Spirit might be saying to you. Let's pray...