



WORSHIP

*Jeff Peabody
New Day Church
Federal Way, WA
April 18, 2010*

If you've secretly been dreaming about getting away from it all, you should put Tristan da Cunha on your destination list. Isn't it beautiful? It's about as far away from reality as you can get. Halfway between South Africa and South America in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, Tristan da Cunha is considered the most remote place in the world (that's actually inhabitable).

It's a small chain of islands, and it would be a great escape. There's lots of interesting wildlife, the scenery is gorgeous, the locals speak English, and with only 275 inhabitants, you'd have plenty of room to yourself.

But wanting to get there isn't enough: you have to think carefully about the transportation, because it isn't easy. Geography has made it impossible to build an airport on any of the islands, so you can't take a plane. It's so far from the mainland that most ships don't go by it. In fact, even planned stops by cruise ships sometimes don't happen, due to weather or tight schedules. Only deep sea fishing vessels can be counted on to regularly reach Tristan da Cunha, because they have a vested interest in doing business with the islands. So grab your tackle box and brush up your salty language and you'll be all set.

There's the dream, and then there's reaching the dream. Last week we talked about New Day's dream – our vision statement. For those of you who missed it, here it is again:

To build a worshipping community of all kinds of people that will be a living testimony to the power of the gospel and the reality of God's kingdom.

That's our destination. It's like that remote island. We've got a clear picture of where we want to go, and it's beautiful.

Getting there is another matter. That's where the New Day core values come in. They are like our transportation, the vehicles that will help us reach where we're headed. The better we become at living out our values, the closer we inch toward where we want to be.

You hear the word values thrown around a lot, but what exactly are they? Take just a minute with the people right around you and see if you can come up with a definition you agree on.

I came up with my own for the way I am using the term this morning, and I would put it like this:

Values

Deeply held convictions that shape our actions and attitudes.

There are lots of levels of values that we hold, and some don't have any shaping influence on our lives at all. For instance, I value starting things on time, but I don't value it enough to begin the service before anybody is here. I value sleeping in but not enough to override the alarm every day. The values that we're talking about are the ones that are central enough to our lives that they actually change the way we behave.

When New Day was first started, we identified 7 core values that we wanted to have that kind of influence over our choices. They aren't the only values we have as a church, but they are 7 markers that we believe are an important part of who we want to be. Over the next several weeks we'll look at each of these in more depth, but just so you'll know where we're going, here they all are at once:

1. Worship is central.
2. Truth must be well-told.
3. The church is a mission outpost.
4. Every Christian is a minister.
5. Authenticity rules the day.
6. The church must lead the way in love & reconciliation.
7. The Who question outranks the How question.

At the top of the list is one we touched on briefly last week, which is this:

Worship is central.

What do we mean by worship? It's one of those churchy words that we use a lot, but rarely define in a helpful way. And it's a BIG topic. Here at New Day we talk about singing worship songs, we sit through a worship service, and we might even talk about worship as a way of life. But that still doesn't really explain it. So we can have this vague uncertainty about what it means.

At the same time, reducing it to a definition feels like it could suck the life right out of it. Worship is supposed to be anything but dry and academic. So instead of a definition, I'd like to talk about a story of worship found in the book of Exodus. It's a slice of life description from Israel's worship when they were out in the desert, and I love what it has to say to us about keeping worship central. And it gives us some very practical handles for thinking about it.

Exodus 33:7-11

Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the "tent of meeting." Anyone inquiring of the LORD would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the LORD spoke with Moses. Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to his tent. The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend.

There is such a simple purity to this scene. You can imagine what it might have been like to be an Israelite. You're busy with your work when one of your kids would say, "It's Moses! He's going to the tent! Come quick!" And you'd get up and go watch again. Off in the distance you could make out the figure of Moses just as he was going inside. Then the amazing part as the cloud funneled down right from the sky to the tent itself. Tall and narrow like a pillar, billowing like smoke but going down instead of up. There was a fire on the street behind us Friday, with this big column of black smoke, and a whole line of cars drove over just to see it. Something about smoke always captivates people. This smoke even more so. You would stand in wonder at the thought of God himself somehow present within that mist. It would never get old. You would be mesmerized with a sense of awe as you tried to take it in.

We read that and think, "What a privileged time to live in." And it was. But it was born out of horrific circumstances. Just prior to this story, Moses had been up on Mt. Sinai, getting the ten commandments from God. The people knew that's where he was. They saw God's glory come down like a fire on the mountain. And yet while Moses was up there talking to God, the rest of the community spent their time making themselves a new idol, a new god to follow.

Have you ever been so infuriated with someone that you had to physically leave the room so you didn't lose it? God basically said to Moses, "I can't be with these people right now, they're so set against me. I might destroy them if I'm anywhere near them."

Moses went back and confronted the people. Then he ran interference for them with God, pleading their case and trying to smooth things over. It was a very precarious moment where God could easily have wiped the Israelites off the face of the earth.

It was on the heels of this incident that Moses sets up what he called the "Tent of Meeting." Given what had happened, Moses wasn't about to set up a place of worship right in the middle of this sinful people. That would be like throwing a lit match into a trash can full of paper. God's holiness might just consume everyone. There needed to be an alternate way. So Moses sets up this place to meet with God outside their camp – accessible to the people but separate from them at the same time for their own protection.

One of the most important truths we can take from this story has to do with **the place of worship**. If we think about the Israelite camp representing our own sinful hearts, we don't have a place good inside enough for connecting with God. For all our best intentions, we come up short.

But like Moses, Christ found a place where unholy people could connect with a holy God. That place was Calvary. In fact, the author of the book of Hebrews talks about how what Jesus did through his death was similar to what Moses did in setting up the tent of meeting:

Hebrews 13:12-13

And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp...

The cross is that safe place outside the camp, that place that's separate from anything we've got going in our own lives. It stands apart from our own failed attempts at being good enough. It's the place where we can go and meet with God without fear. It's a place of humility, because we have to leave everything behind when we go there. The author Brennan Manning once said, "At Sunday worship...many of us pretend to believe we are sinners. Consequently, all we can do is pretend to believe we have been forgiven."

When we ignore our need for confession and forgiveness, we can't expect to truly worship, because we're ignoring the only place God has set up for it to happen. Anything else is just about us.

This is so important I want to take a moment right here to allow you to bring anything you might need to before God and ask his forgiveness. Scripture says that when we hold on to sin in our hearts, we can't expect God to listen. So before we go any further, let's go to the cross.

When we let worship become about us instead of the cross, it will revolve around questions like, "Am I passionate enough for God? Am I praying enough? Have I sacrificed enough? Is my heart loyal enough?" Or it will be about the church's performance. Was it polished enough? Did it feel holy enough? Did the worship leader's phone go off in the middle of the service? Was I moved by the music or the preaching or the testimonies?

I read a story this week about Genshin Fujinami, dubbed the marathon monk. He took a seven year journey in straw sandals that was the equivalent of walking around the globe. It's such a punishing ordeal that only 46 people have completed it in the past 400 years. According to the rules of the ritual, he was not allowed to stop. At one point he had to go nine days without food or drink or sleep. He had to carry a rope and knife with him, because if he was unable to finish, he was supposed to take his own life immediately. It was about the most extreme act of devotion and worship a human could attempt. At the end he was quoted as saying, "I feel that I have accomplished a job, that is all. I do not know whether I should call it enlightenment or not."

Here's a man who went to the extreme of human potential for worship, and still he came away with no sense of certainty that it had done anything. That tells me something about my own efforts that are far more meager than his. I need something more solid. I need the certainty that God promises we find through Jesus and nowhere else.

When Moses had set up the tent of meeting, the writer tells us this:

Anyone inquiring of the LORD would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp.

Anybody could inquire of God. Anybody. Once the place was established, the invitation was wide open. No matter who you were, you could seek God's counsel at the Tent of Meeting. We have that same wide open invitation from Jesus.

Matthew 11:28

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

All who are weary. Whoever believes in him. Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord. There is no exclusivity. Each time we admit our need for Jesus and go to him, worship begins.

Besides telling us about the place of worship, this little story also talks to us about **the practice of worship**. Look again at what the people were doing:

As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the LORD spoke with Moses. Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to his tent.

We're not told how frequently this happened – if Moses trekked out there three times a day or once a week. It just says **WHENEVER** it happened, the people dropped what they were doing and went to watch from their doorways. There was this physical act that happened that shifted their attention from their daily affairs to worship.

I've talked to many of you about the clock my dad built for Addison for his 13th birthday. It's this amazing labor of love. All the gears are hand cut out of wood. It has a pendulum that swings back and forth and makes a nice tick tock sound. People come over and just stare at it, because it's truly a work of art.

Don't tell my dad I said this, but the thing's also a little finicky. Actually he already knows. Because he's had to help with some of the adjustments. Every so often the clock just stops running. We have to recalibrate it so that it keeps doing what it was designed to do. It's nice looking when it just sits there, but it was intended to keep time.

As the Israelites set their eyes on that pillar of cloud, they were recalibrating their hearts. And in a real sense, that's what worship is about for us as well. We were designed and

created to give glory to God. When you push all the way back, that's the underlying purpose for our existence. But many times, for whatever reason, we stop doing that. Maybe a sin gets in the way, maybe we get refocused on ourselves. Maybe time passes and we forget what God has done for us. And the clock stops running in our hearts.

That's where the conscious choices of worship come in, and we can think of it as recalibrating. We get up and shift our eyes to see the reality of God come down. We do it through prayer as we pour out our hearts to God. We do that by singing about what he has done and who he is. We come together as God's people to encourage each other and hear again the stories of his love.

Is your heart feeling like it has stopped ticking for God? What are you doing to recalibrate this morning? Worship is all about reorienting our eyes to him whenever and however we can.

Two times in this passage of Scripture, the author points out where the Israelites were for this recalibrating. They were standing at the entrances to their own tents. They weren't all running over to Joe and Melissa's tent for a better view. Everybody could see from their own home. And it was from the doorways of their homes that they worshipped God.

Doorways are those points of connection between the inside and the outside. And I believe God has put doorways in each and every one of our lives, openings where we can go and catch a glimpse of him through circumstances and events that take place.

A doorway can be almost anything. When something good happens and you stop to thank him for it, that's a doorway. When you are faced with a decision and you ask him for guidance and then see how he answers, that's a doorway. When you're under tremendous stress and you seek his peace in the middle of it, that's a doorway to worship.

Some of you may have heard the story in the news this week about Nadia Bloom, the 11 year old girl with Asperger Syndrome who was lost for 4 days in an alligator-infested swamp in Florida. It was a truly miraculous rescue. In an interview, her father said he was so afraid for her, especially at night. He later found out that Nadia just kept praying the whole time and reciting Proverbs 3:5-6 over and over.

Proverbs 3:5-6

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart
And lean not on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him
And he will direct your paths.*

What a fantastic example of worshipping in a very dark doorway. It's humbling to think of that little girl leaning so wholly on God. And I'm so glad the story had a happy ending. But every day we have such entrances right in our own tents, right in our own

circumstances. It is a matter of our own choosing if we will get up and go there to look for God in the situation he's given to us.

Romans 12:1

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life — your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life — and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him.

Worship is a matter of recalibrating and it's a matter of getting to the door to catch a glimpse of God. But it's also more than that. The Israelites didn't just stand and look off into the desert – there was something there to look at. The shift in where they looked and where they stood was so they could experience God and rise up out of themselves.

John Muir was a great outdoorsman and writer from the 1800s. He's the one they named Camp Muir after on Mt. Rainier. He just loved being in the mountains. There's a famous story about him from December of 1874. He was out hiking when a big windstorm kicked up. For most of us, the thought of being alone on the ground on a mountain in bad weather sounds frightening. But not John Muir. He wanted to enter into the storm. So he looked around and found a 100 foot Douglas Fir tree that was whipping around in the wind. And he proceeded to climb all the way to the top.

He knew the tree was strong enough to withstand the storm, so he was freed from worrying for his safety. He then could devote all his attention to what was going on around him. And he writes that it was the most incredible experience. He said the trees dancing around looked like they were having the best time in the storm. He could hear all the different music the wind was making in the leaves and branches. There was all this fragrance he could smell, from pine needles to flowers to a hint of the sea. He said it was delicious. He stayed up there for hours, taking it all in.

Worship is intended to lift us up out of ourselves so we become more aware of God than our own fears and concerns that we have when we're down on the ground. It's climbing up to the treetops for the breathtaking view. I think of Isaiah and his vision of God where he saw him on the throne in the temple, with the smoke and the cherubim and the ground shaking beneath him. I think of John seeing the one with the eyes burning like fire and the rainbow all around him. I think of the disciples on the mountain seeing Jesus become dazzling white. Worship is getting caught up in God's unmatched beauty, seeing someone so far beyond us that we are flattened to the floor and at the same time thoroughly reinvigorated in all our senses.

You're probably thinking, "That sounds terrific. But I have no idea how to get there." And I'll be the first to admit that most of my worship times are not some lofty experience where I'm transported to another dimension. But I do know this: When I take time in my prayer and Scripture reading to focus on who God is rather than just what I need him to do for me, it changes my worship. The way to see him more clearly is through starting out prayer the way Jesus told his disciples to start prayers:

*Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed by your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

That's rising up out of yourself, looking beyond your immediate needs for God to acknowledge his very nature.

This brings us to our final point I'd like to highlight in this story -- **the person of worship**. The author of Exodus ends this section with a wonderful line:

The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend.

I saw a quote from the comedian Bill Maher, who said, "God must have a real ego problem since we're supposed to worship him all the time." That's such a sad distorted view of worship, for two reasons. First is because being egotistical is having an overinflated view of yourself, which would be impossible for God. Worship just acknowledges what is true – that we're the creatures and He's the Creator. If an ant came up to an elephant and said, "Who do you think you are? You're no bigger than me," who would be having the ego problem? The elephant doesn't need the ant's endorsement. But it would be wise for the ant to reconsider his position.

But the second reason Bill Maher's quote is sad is because it misses out on what worship IS about, from God's perspective.

I had never really given that much thought until one day several years ago that will always stand out in my mind. Isaac was just a few months old. I walked in one morning to get him out of his crib. He was laying on his stomach. But when he heard the door, he pushed himself up on his arms and looked at me, and his face broke out in this wide smile. That was the first time that had ever happened.

As a new dad, can I tell you how good that made me feel? My little boy recognized me and was happy to see me. He knew me and trusted me and liked me. And in that moment, it occurred to me that God must experience some of that same father joy when his children recognize him and are happy to see him.

Psalm 147:11

*The LORD delights in those who fear him,
who put their hope in his unfailing love.*

God doesn't NEED our worship – but he loves it. Albert Einstein once said, "I think the most important question facing humanity is, 'Is the universe a friendly place?'"

The way we answer that determines how we live our lives, if we see the world as being against us, indifferent or on our side. The same could be said about our view of God. Do I believe he's friendly? That will shape the way I worship. If God's just a force to be

respected, worship will be cold and formal. If I see God as hostile, worship will be out of fear. But if I know him as a friendly God who wants a relationship with me, then y worship will be personal.

This is the most audacious, preposterous notion in the Christian faith – that the God of the entire universe is deeply interested in each of us as individuals and that it's possible to have an actual friendship with him.

John 15:15

I'm no longer calling you servants because servants don't understand what their master is thinking and planning. No, I've named you friends because I've let you in on everything I've heard from the Father.

God talked to Moses as with a friend. We're invited to have that same close level of communication that we enjoy in other friendships.

A friend is someone who knows you for who you are. A friend is someone you don't pretend with because you don't have to impress them. Mostly a friend is someone you enjoy being with and look forward to talking to.

At the center of the throne of heaven, in all his dazzling brilliance and awesome power sits someone who loves you and me in a personal way, who desires friendship. That's the compelling truth we find at the heart of worship.

As we said last week, these values aren't just values for some abstract group called New Day. If they're going to apply to us as a group, we have to apply them individually, because we are the church. How central am I keeping worship?

Am I starting from the cross? Is there stuff I need to confess and find forgiveness for? Worship stalls out when we don't admit our need for Christ every step of the way.

What doorway is in front of me right now? What's the situation in my life where I can catch a glimpse of God? Is there a circumstance where I've not wanted to go and find God because it's just too painful or too much work?

What kind of God am I worshipping? Do I see him as personal and friendly? How I think of him will change how I worship.

I want to end our time this morning by giving you a chance to climb a tree and get caught up in God. About 3-1/2 years ago I shared an audio clip in a service from Dr. S.M. Lockridge. He recorded it many years ago, and it is still one of the most inspired descriptions of God I have ever heard. As you listen, I pray that it will draw your heart in to worship our great God.