

“Don’t Just Do Something, Stand There”

Psalm 46

Series: Essentials for Frontline Workers

Week 1: Worship

The Rev. Dr. Douglas C. Hoglund

The Woodside Church

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Has this happened to you? You arrive at the store, the pizza take out, here at church and suddenly discover you forgot your mask! So you get creative. You cover your face with your hand and hope they think it’s a matching skin colored mask. You pretend you’re sneezing into your elbow – for twenty minutes. You pull up your shirt like that kid in the Bazooka Joe comic strips. On this date one year ago almost nobody wore masks. Now nearly everyone does. They’ve even become a fashion statement. Medical professionals wear more than masks. They also strap on goggles, face shields and hazmat suits. It’s essential for frontline workers.

Well as far as Jesus is concerned you are a frontline worker. He tells you to go:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations... Matthew 28:19

Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Mark 16:15

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Luke 10:2-3

Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. John 20:21

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:8

Jesus doesn’t tell His disciples to stay, sit and consume. He wants us to go and tell His Good News, go and share His grace, go and serve as His Body, go and show His love. If you are a disciple of Jesus then you are a frontline worker. And if you are a frontline worker – you need some tools to help you do your mission. You need the essentials. Today, this first Sunday of Lent, we launch a new series: Essentials for Frontline Workers. In this series we will focus on the six core practices of a disciple.

But first: What is a disciple? Before I give you an overview of these essentials we need to make a distinction between the terms disciple and member. In America, many Christians call themselves a member of a church. Many denominations have a membership system. Here at Woodside for many years we’ve kept a membership roll. Once you take a class – Inquirer’s or Roots Class – and publically declare your faith in Jesus you become an official member and your name is put on the roll. If you move away or you stop participating we are supposed to take you off the roll. So what’s wrong with this? Many members tend to view the church like a club. They might think, “So long as I pay my dues and my name is on the roll and I show up occasionally, I’m still in the club.” This club mentality means in most churches 20% of the people do 80% of the work. In most Presbyterian churches average worship attendance is about 30% of the

membership number. Woodside's percentages are higher but we don't see anywhere near the 783 members we have on the rolls except on Christmas and Easter.

More significant is Jesus never told us to go make church members. The word "member" only appears in the Gospels five times and three of them refer to being a member of the Jewish Ruling council which judged Jesus worthy of death. What did Jesus tell us to make? Disciples (Matthew 28:19). The word "disciple" appears 294 times in the Gospels and Acts. What's the difference between Membership and Discipleship? Membership is in a club. Discipleship is a calling. Membership is a line – you are either in or out. Discipleship is a journey. Jesus says, "Follow me" (John 21:19, 22). Members, at a minimum, pays dues. Disciples are told to give their lives: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Mark 8:34. Anyone can be a disciple of Jesus if they follow Jesus. You don't have to go through a class or have your name on a roll. You can start the journey, pause, take a break, go backwards or keep in step. It's up to you how you follow Jesus. Disciples will be at different places on the journey. My role, as pastor, is not to determine if you are in or out of the club but to help you take the next step on your discipleship journey with Jesus. Our role is to equip you with the essential practices you need to be a frontline disciple for Jesus. So at Woodside we are shifting our focus from being a member to being a disciple.

What do disciples do? They **Love God, Grow in Grace and Share with Others**. Our mission at Woodside is to help every child, teen and adult Love God, Grow in Grace and Share with Others. This doesn't only apply to what you do in this building. It's the way you live outside the box in your home, at school and work, in the community. It's the way you live as a worker for Jesus on the frontline. This mission is based on the two Great Commandments (Matthew 22:37-40) Love God and Love your Neighbor and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) Make Disciples. Each of these three breaks down into two actions.

Love God = Worshiping and Praying
Grow in Grace = Welcoming and Learning
Share with Others = Giving and Serving

These are the six core practices, the six essential tools you need to be a disciple of Jesus. Each week we will look at an Essential practice. The more you practice them in your everyday life, the closer you will follow Jesus, the more they'll change your life and the lives of those around you.

The first Essential is: Loving God through Worship. When it comes to worship, we have it all wrong. We think worship is an event (a service), a time of the week (Sunday), a location (sanctuary), a show you passively observe. And afterwards, you may evaluate it like it's a TV show on Amazon Prime. Here are a few truths about worship:

Everyone Worships. It's not a matter of choosing whether you will worship or not. Everyone does. Even atheists worship. The symbol for the American Atheist Society is an atom. Guess what they worship? In the history of religion, most societies worship forces of nature – gods of wind, sun, storms, water – or forces of human nature – war, love, wealth, fertility, prosperity, birth, death. "Worship" comes from the old English word – worth-ship. When we worship we declare a person, place or thing to be of great worth, to be valuable, to be precious to

us. So the question is not, “Will I worship or not?” but “Who or what do I worship?” and “Is that person, place or thing truly worth of my worship?”

We Worship All the Time. Worship is simply saying, “I love you.” Precovid, the average American Christian attended a worship service about once every two or three weeks for an hour. But you love God far more than that. Imagine if you only loved your family when you saw them at dinner. Your spouse might start wondering who you are loving the rest of the time. Worship is not an event you attend. It’s a lifestyle. You and I are constantly worshipping. Our goal, according to the Bible, is to love God every day in everyway. We gather here weekly to refocus on the one True God. Why? That leads to a third truth which may surprise you.

We Worship Many Things. We say we only worship one God. So did the Israelites in the Bible. Yet their greatest and most frequently sin was idolatry. They worshiped the gods of the other nations: the storm god, the fertility goddess, the sun god, the moon goddess, the gods of the powerful empires which threatened them and conquered them. Why did they turn away from the one True God, who gave them so much, and go after false idols? They believed the other gods would make them healthy, wealthy and wise, they would give them life, liberty and happiness. Nothing wrong with wanting these things – except that these gods couldn’t deliver.

We claim to worship only one God. Want to discover what you truly worship, what is highly valuable to you? Check out on what you spend your most valuable treasures – your time, your money, your energy and attention. Your calendar, your phone, your TV, your computer and your bank account can tell you the answer. Our days are actually a complicated dance of trying to please many gods. Everything we give our time, money, energy and attention to can become our gods. Does this mean we must give up everything and give all our time, money, energy and attention to God? No and Yes. No we do not need to give up everything. It is, in fact, God who gives us everything – to enjoy not to worship. This is not a competition – it’s not love God or your family, school or work. It’s love God through your family, school or work. We have it backwards. Too often we worship things and use God. Instead, let’s use things to love and worship God. Don’t put God first above your family, school, work or yourself. Put God first in your family, at school, at work and in your life. What do I have to do to do that?

Nothing. I mean it. Do nothing. Before you GO, Jesus wants you to BE. Just Be. Be still. Psalm 46 is a short yet powerful song of worship. Its sole purpose is to remind the people of Israel that their God, the Lord Almighty, the God of Jacob, is the only one to worship.

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. (Psalm 46:1-3).

God is more powerful than all forces of nature. These were all the gods the people worshiped. Don’t praise the mountain god it will quake and collapse. Don’t sing to the sea god it’s just a lot of foam. Don’t fear the storm god it will scatter and break up. The author goes on:

Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. He makes wars cease to the ends of

the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire. (Psalm 46: 6-7, 9).

God is more powerful than all forces of human nature. Nations may threaten and roar, attack and fight. All we hold dear may collapse. Yet God still stands. In time of trouble, He is our fortress, our refuge, our strength. On the night which followed the fall of the Twin Towers and the attack upon our Pentagon fortress, the symbols of our financial and military power, people spontaneously gathered in our sanctuary for worship and prayer. When we saw the collapse of all we depended on, we instinctively knew where to go – the One power which is truly greater than all powers on earth – to the Lord Almighty, to the God of Jacob who is our fortress, our refuge and our strength. That night I read this Psalm.

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. (Psalm 46:10-11).

When everything is roaring, foaming and falling down around us, we know where to turn.

Now more than ever, as we struggle through this pandemic, as we see battle lines drawn between leaders and neighbors on all sides, we need to turn to the Lord who is our strength, our refuge and our Rock. Let me suggest three mind shifts that will help you do the essential practice of worship every day in every way.

Stop Trying to Run the World – that’s God’s Job. Nearly all our stress in life comes from the false belief that I can get things to go my way, follow my direction, do my will. I’m sorry to break this news to you but, you’re not in charge. You’re not running the show. You certainly have a part to play, you need to keep doing it. Just get off the Director’s chair, do what you can and let the rest go. During the day, whenever you feel stress, worry, anger or fear simply pause and say, “I’m glad God’s running the world, not me.”

Look for Where God is Working in Your Day. The second mind shift is to stop thinking God is only up in heaven and start looking for where He is working around you. Look for what He is doing. Praise and thank Him for what He is doing. Most of all join Him in what He is doing. Instead of asking God to bless your work, ask God to help you bless His work.

Love God in Everything You Do. Make everything you do an offering of praise and thanksgiving to Jesus. The way you shop for groceries, the help you offer a neighbor during a snow storm, the time you spend with your spouse, children, grandchildren, the zoom meeting for work, your studies in school, the posts you put on social media. Make every action an offering of love. And if you don’t feel love while you are doing it, ask yourself why and how would God want you to do it?

Martin Luther King, Jr. gave a sermon at Barratt Junior High School here in Philadelphia called “What is Your Life’s Blueprint?”

If it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, sweep streets like Beethoven composed music, sweep streets like Leontyne Price sings before the Metropolitan Opera. Sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep

streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will have to pause and say: Here lived a great street sweeper who swept his job well.

Stop, Look and Love. These shifts will help you love God through worship every moment of every day.

I want to give you a treat today. I offer you an opportunity to let God speak to you. For the next few minutes I want you to close your eyes and meditate on a single verse of Scripture. Please get comfortable. Relax. If you fall asleep I won't be offended and neither will God. I want to give you a chance to be still in the presence of God. I will read a verse of Scripture and then pause for a minute so you can listen in your spirit for what God is saying to you about that verse. Then I will repeat the verse, taking away one word and pausing again for a minute. That little change will likely give the verse a new meaning and provide you with an opportunity for God to say something more to you. Sometimes the verse will sound like an incomplete sentence, a fill in the blank. Listen for how God will fill in the blank for you. If you are ready, here is the verse:

“Be still and know that I am God”

“Be still and know that I am”

“Be still and know that I”

“Be still and know that”

“Be still and know”

“Be still and”

“Be still”

“Be”

Amen.