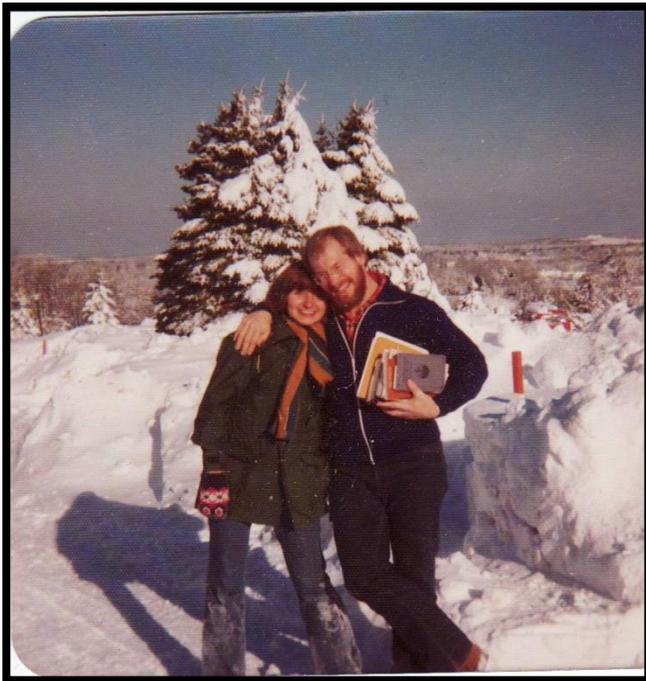


**“Worship Is Deep In Our Bones”**  
**Sermon Series on *Worship Is...* #4**  
**Dr. Peter B. Barnes**  
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**(Ps. 23)**

**Introduction.**

Do you remember a time when you fell in love? You noticed someone across the room, and you decided you wanted to meet them. It might have been in class, or at work, on the internet, or at a social event. They caught your eye, and you began to plan how you might connect with them.

And then you go on your first date, and the chemistry is almost instant. You talk for hours and lose track of time. It feels like you’ve known the person forever. You experience emotions unlike anything you’ve ever known before, and you wonder what’s going on inside your heart.



The first time I met Lorie, we were both in seminary. She was the student manager of the cafeteria, and I met her while she was checking off the names of students in the dorm who ate there. Later that week they had a new student reception, and she was working the event. Do you know how you can look at someone and tell that they’ve been looking at you? You look their way, and you see their head turn from looking at you. Well, every time I looked at Lorie, I saw her head turn away. And I thought to myself, “She’s looking at me as much as I’m looking at her!” We went out on our first date about a month later, and the rest is history.

The Bible says that when God created our first parents Adam and Eve, He caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep and He took one of Adam’s ribs and created Eve. Adam’s response was, *“This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman for she was taken out of man”* (Gen.2:23).

That kind of love is deep in our bones. There’s a feeling that the other person completes something that was lacking in our lives, and it affects us to the core of our being. I would suggest to you that having a relationship with God is somewhat like falling in love. And the more you come to know and love Him, the more you will discover that worship is deep in your bones, too. Let me explain what I mean.

Have you ever given much thought to the language we use in worship? I remember hearing my mother pray when I was growing up, and sometimes it sounded like she was talking to the Queen of England. “Dear Father, we pray Thee that in Thy good care that Thou wouldst watch over and keep us this day as we seek to live according to Thy Word.”

My mother never talked to anyone else with the words “thee,” “thy,” and “thou,” and I wondered why she did when she talked to God. Later, I came to understand that she’d been raised reading the King James Version of the Bible, and the language of 17<sup>th</sup> century England pervaded expressions of worship and devotion for the folks of her generation. Perhaps this was the case for some of you. I have to admit that the grace and cadence of old English has a beauty all to itself.

I came of age in the 1960s and 70s, a radical time in our nation’s history. We reacted to (or should I say rebelled against?!) our parents in every way, and that was also reflected in the language we began to use in worship when people like me became Christians during the Jesus Movement. Praise choruses replaced hymns in our singing, we jettisoned the King James Version from everyday use, and we were intent on reclaiming what we considered “authentic” worship that was free of what we perceived as expressions that were formal and stuffy.

I look back now with some amusement at our radical expressions I realize that more often than not they were formed out of rebellion rather than biblical theology. However, I also appreciate the fact that we wanted to express our love for God in authentic and personal ways. Our zeal was not always according to knowledge, and perhaps there was more smoke to our expressions than real fire, but we were sincere nonetheless. That’s when I realized and began to experience for myself this kind of worship that is deep in the bones.

**The language we use in  
worship is important.**

The reason I bring this up is because I believe the language we use in worship is very important. All too often we blindly recite creeds and pray prayers, we sing hymns and choruses, but we don’t really give careful attention to the words we’re saying or singing. Or we talk in a way that is atypical to any other conversation we have with another person. If I were to declare my love to Lorie by saying, “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways...”, I don’t think my recitation of that poem about love is going to move her very much. It isn’t me. It doesn’t sound real or authentic. I’m talking like someone else.

It’s also easy to fall into a rut in worship, and we all need to try and breathe fresh life into our expressions of worship every week. If we simply go through the motions, if it becomes a rote exercise, nothing touches our minds and hearts, and we go away unaffected and unchanged. Worship should be transformational, and because of that it needs to be in the language of the people that comes from the heart.

For many centuries of the church's history, worship was expressed in a language that very few people knew or could understand. The language was Latin, and only the educated could read and write it. Everyone else was pretty much in the dark. Nevertheless, people went to mass week after week, perhaps drawn to the mystery of the sacrament or the pageantry of the drama. Or maybe it was because they are afraid of God's wrath, and they wanted to appease Him. Perhaps they simply liked the lilting sound of the liturgy. But they never really understood what was being said, and God seemed far away to them. Maybe some of you who come from a Roman Catholic background and lived in pre-Vatican II can remember the Latin mass and understand what I'm talking about more than rest of us.

All that changed during the Reformation in the 1500s. Martin Luther, John Calvin and others realized that worship needed to be put into the language of the people, and it needed to be accessible to the average person, regardless of their education or background. For that reason, they translated the Bible into their own language, and they wrote songs which would be sung and understood by everyone.

Sometimes they took tunes that were sung in the beer halls of Europe and put Christian lyrics to them. Even the liturgy of worship was rewritten and sometimes done away with altogether in an effort to put worship in the vernacular. One of the central values we Presbyterians carry with us today from the Reformation is that worship should be in the language of the people, and it needs to be an authentic expression of the heart.

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Psalm 23 is one of the great passages in all the Bible, and it has brought comfort to millions of people over the years. It's one of the first passages of Scripture people memorize when they are growing up or when they become a Christian, and this psalm is read at more funerals than any other. It's probably the best known psalm in the Bible.

One reason it's so popular is because in this brief poem David expresses the authentic cry of the human heart which we all experience at one time or another. Everyone wants a shepherd to protect them. And there are times when we feel helpless like sheep, and we yearn for some peaceful rest by a quiet stream. Our souls are weary, and they need to be restored. Eventually every one of us will know what it's like to be afraid when we have to walk through the valley of the shadow of death. I know Lorie and I are battling some of those fears right now, and this psalm has spoken to us in a fresh way this past week. And each of us hopes that God will protect us from our enemies and will eventually enable us to triumph and overcome them in the end.

The words of Psalm 23 are a wonderful example of worship that is deep in the bones. It's authentic, it's real, and it speaks from the heart. It talks openly about the difficult things we face in life, and it doesn't try to candy coat the problems. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm also states clearly what the author wants most of all – to live in the house of the Lord forever.

## What keeps us from experiencing that kind of worship?

What keeps us from experiencing that kind of worship? What prevents us from this deep soul connection with God that I've been talking about? I think there are many reasons. One of them is that, for many of us, we aren't desperate enough. We have our lives pretty much put together, and we don't want anything to mess them up. We try to be good people, and we think that if our good deeds outweigh our bad ones, then God will reward us. We want Him to bless our children, and we want Him to bless our businesses, but we don't want Him to get in the way. In some ways we hope Jesus will simply be a "performance enhancing drug" so we can win in life and live our best life ever. But that kind of approach will never take us to a deeper experience of worship. Until you become desperate for God and realize He is your only hope, you probably won't experience worship that is deep in the bones.

Another reason we don't experience a deep soul connection with God in worship is because we allow things to take His rightful place in our hearts. Sometimes it is sin and disobedience to what we know God wants us to do. We're like the prodigal son and choose to go off to the far country. As long as we tolerate sin in our lives, we'll never experience the kind of worship I'm talking about. Another problem is we have idols in our lives that take the place of God. We allow a good thing to become an ultimate thing, and it becomes more important to us than God Himself. You and I will never experience worship that is deep in our bones as long as there is something or someone else competing with God for first place in our hearts.

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Some of my greatest experiences and most lasting memories of worship have come from times I have had the privilege of praising God with fellow believers overseas. I recall the sheer delight of watching the children of Tanzania process into cinderblock churches in rural villages with their synchronized movements of dance and their melodic call-and-response singing.

I remember huddling with other Christians who spoke very little English under a brightly-colored canopy in a village in southern India. We were there for a groundbreaking ceremony for a new church building. The townspeople stood at the fringes of the clearing in curiosity. After the ceremony, new converts to the Faith led a parade of church members through the village out to the rice fields, singing loudly as they went, and playing many kinds of musical instruments. There they made their profession of faith in Christ and were baptized. The rest of the congregation stood on the banks and sang Indian hymns to the glory of God.

And I recall worshipping in Linlithgow, Scotland, in a magnificent building that was constructed in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. The elegant formality of high worship in the Church of

Scotland and the beautiful harmonies of the choir lifted my spirit to the heavens as I felt connected to the rich roots of our heritage and tradition as Presbyterians.

However, I have to confess that on occasion I have also experienced dissonance when worshipping with believers overseas. This has occurred whenever people of another culture have tried to imitate our worship in the West in an effort to take not only our Savior for themselves but also our cultural expression.

There was the time in the Dominican Republic when we dedicated a newly constructed church building, and I thought I was at a Billy Graham Crusade done in Spanish. A young man played “Just As I Am” on his accordion as the evangelist pastor pled with people to come forward and give their lives to Christ. Eventually, the two sons of the associate pastor were pressed into service and went forward to make a good showing, even though they had surely given their lives to Christ many times before.

I also remember the Korean congregation that worshipped in our church in Alexandria, Virginia, on Sunday afternoons many years ago. All the hymns they sang were in Korean. However, all the tunes were from Europe and America. Have you ever heard “Holy, Holy, Holy” sung in Korean?! I couldn’t help but wonder, “Where are the Korean tunes? Where is the indigenous music of the people?”

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Today, we live in a world in which there are many different languages that are spoken, and here in America there is a great deal of talk about multiculturalism. Increasingly, it’s difficult to offer worship which meets the needs of everyone and connects at a deep soul level, and we find ourselves pressed to present a diversity of options for people which afford the opportunity for them to worship in a “language” that is more “native” to their experience. You may think I’m talking about foreign languages like Spanish or Korean, but I’m really talking about the different musical languages people prefer! There is a great need today is to provide experiences of worship which accommodate the different musical styles and preferences of a changing world to the extent we are able.

Here at First Pres we seem to have navigated what some call the “worship wars” with not too much bloodshed so far, and we celebrate the diversity of our worship expressions. Currently, we offer two styles of worship and music. At 8:45 AM we offer worship in a more traditional format with music that is driven by pipe organ and choir. At 11 o’clock we offer worship in a more contemporary format, and the music is led by a band. We’ve also begun to institute some new changes to that service in an effort to respond to what we believe are new winds of the Holy Spirit that are blowing in our congregation, and we’re going to experiment with what we’re calling Ancient/Modern worship.

This diversity of worship styles stretches us sometimes, but it appears we all want to be tolerant of one another and the musical and worship preferences which different people hold. What works for one person doesn’t work for another, and as long as we keep our worship Christ-centered and biblically based, we can celebrate the different approaches. Same present, different wrapping.

People today have very different ideas about what makes for good worship, especially in the area of music. It's a tribute to the graciousness of our congregation that we flex with each other in the diversity of our preferences. I'm the one who benefits the most, because I get to go to two different worship services every Sunday morning. However, I must confess that sometimes I do get tired of hearing the same sermon twice!

### **Conclusion.**

I remember the night not too many days ago when Dr. Billy Rice called to tell Lorie and me the difficult news that she has multiple myeloma. We learned that it's a cancer of the blood which affects the bones. That explains all the fractures she's been having this fall. The news was devastating to us, and it rocked our world. There is no cure, but it is very treatable, and we have hope. It's taken us to our knees, and we have worshiped God there.

The problems we face in life are usually deep in our bones, just like Lorie's cancer. Sin is a spiritual disorder that needs to be corrected, and Jesus is the only one who can do that. And when we come to experience the healing love of God in Christ, the result is worship that is also deep in our bones. We begin to experience transformation and healing which frees us to become our most authentic and truest selves, and our hearts cry out in praise of God.

For me in this season of challenge, worship has become a lifeline. And it's one thing I can cling to which helps get me through another day. Thanks be to God for His marvelous love in Christ Jesus. It's a love that is deep in our bones! Amen.