**Membership Matters** October 25, 15

Would God Cheer at A Football Game?

Would God cheer at a football game?

Does God celebrate?

Would he attend and throw parties?

Would God dance at a wedding? Would he feast?

Does God experience sorrow?

Would he cry at a funeral?

Is he frustrated by sickness?

Does he grieve over a broken body; a damaged mind; a shattered heart?

Does he react in anger to greed, arrogance and cruelty?

Or does he look the other way when bad things happen?

Is God distant and cold? Or is he easy to talk to?

Is God likeable or is he awkward to be with?

I could keep asking questions like these. But I think you’ve got the idea.

What we think about God matters.

But instead of leaving that as a statement, I want to pose it as a question: why does it matter what we think about God?

As we go to our coffee/question time, will you share with another person your answer to that question.

**Feedback**

**People become like the god they worship.**

Look at 2 Kings 17:15b: *They followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless.*

The worship of anything other than God diminishes a person. This is why God said in Isaiah 44:20 that those who do so…. *“feed on ashes.”*

You’ve heard the saying, “You are what you eat?”

It is the same with our spiritual life – we are what we worship.

It matters, not only that it is the Creator God we worship, but that we **truly know the One we worship**. How is it possible to know God rightly?

Fortunately we are not left to our means.

Look at **Romans 1:19-20.**

The phrase *“plain to them”* is repeated for the sake of emphasis.

What has God made plain?

*“His eternal power and his divine nature.”*

The vastness, complexity, intricacy, and inter-connectedness, along with the beauty and design of the universe, the earth and the creatures that live in it, including mankind, reveal the wisdom, creativity, and power of God.

Look at **Psalm 19:1-4a**.

But God doesn’t just reveal himself through the creation.

Look at Hebrews 1:1: *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways…* God is verbal.

For thousands of years God spoke to the family of Abraham through prophets who recorded in writing what God said.

But God doesn’t just reveal himself through the creation and the Scriptures.

Look at John 1:14, 18: *14The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth…*

*18No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father’s side [in closest relationship with the Father], has made him known.*

Jesus made God known; and not in a fleeting glimpse.

Jesus lived among us for 33+ years.

As he did so, humanity was able to see exactly who God is.

Colossians 1:15: *Jesus is the image of the invisible God…*

Hebrews 1:3: *[Jesus] is the exact representation of [God’s] being…*

The creation – reveals God’s power and divine nature.

The Scriptures – reveal God’s thoughts, his heart and his will.

The person of Jesus – reveals exactly who the person of God is.

But there is still more.

Jesus, at the Passover supper, told his disciples three times that the Holy Spirit is... **the Spirit of truth** and that he would make Jesus known.

Let’s look at those three passages and as we do, watch for the emphasis Jesus wants us to see.

First time: **John 14:16-17**

* Jesus had told his disciples that he was going to leave, but that “Someone” would take his place. That someone was the Counselor... the Spirit of truth, who would live with and be in his followers (ever present) **forever** (he wouldn’t come and go).

Jesus had revealed exactly who the Father is.

And the Spirit would reveal exactly who Jesus is.

No exaggeration; no distortion.

Second time: **John 15:26**

* what will the Counselor do when he comes? He will testify... truthfully and accurately about Jesus.

Jesus had been sent by the Father to make him known.

The Father trusted his reputation to Jesus because Jesus is trustworthy.

Now Jesus and the Father send the Spirit to do the very same thing - to tell the truth of who they are.

Third time: **John 16:13-14**

* the Spirit of truth comes to guide the followers of Jesus into what? Into…ALL truth.
* as the Spirit does so, he doesn’t speak on his own, but communicates only what he hears the Father and the Son say

Hebrews 6:18 says: *...it is impossible for God to lie...*

God cannot lie.

As the third person of the Godhead, what the Spirit reveals about the person of God the Father and God the Son is truthful and accurate.

The creation – reveals God’s power and divine nature.

The Scriptures – reveal God’s thoughts, his heart and his will.

The person of Jesus – reveals exactly who the person of God is.

And the Spirit of truth, who comes to live in us, uses these three means –

the creation, the Scriptures, the person of Jesus - to keep ever before us,

who our God is.

Is it important that we know God rightly? According to God it is.

This is why it is of the utmost importance that not only our lives be **permeated** with God’s Spirit (last week’s teaching emphasis), but that our eyes be filled with the wonders of God’s creation, and our minds **saturated** with his written word.

When God finally spoke to Job, he did not directly answer any of Job’s questions. Instead, in chapters 38-41 God directed Job to look at the creation and see there what it revealed of God’s character and his power.

Doing so helped Job to once again see God…*high and lifted up.*

In college I had a friend named Peter – every night he watched the sunset. Those moments of pause reminded Peter of who God is and in turn who Peter was. Sitting there quietly, was a deliberate act on the part of Peter to keep the focus of his life on his Creator.

Hebrews 3:1 and 12:2 says:

Hebrews 3:1: *…fix your thoughts on Jesus…*

Hebrews 12:2: *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus…*

How do we do that?

Colossians 3:16: *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly…*

For the word of Christ to live in us richly, requires us to read and to think upon the Scriptures; not just for a few moments, but long enough that the Spirit can use those words to keep our focus on Jesus.

Can I share with you what the Holy Spirit did one day this week as I read God’s word? I’m reading through the book of Jeremiah.

On Tuesday I reached chapter 20. Look at verse 11.

*The Lord is with me…*

I’ve told you many times that this is an often repeated promise of God to people when he asks them to do something for him that is beyond them.

But in this verse the Spirit impressed upon me to take note that God is with me… *like a mighty warrior.*

The passage doesn’t say I am a mighty warrior.

It says God is with me like a mighty warrior.

As a mighty warrior God is more than capable to deal with anything that would come against me.

I believe this is why God’s Spirit moved Paul to write in Romans 8:31…

*if God is for us who can be against us?*

The Spirit also brought to my remembrance that one of the names of God – **the Lord of Hosts** – means that God is the Lord of heaven’s armies.

Do you realize that the angels are also warriors?

If one angel can take out an army of 185,000 human soldiers, as was the case in 2 Kings 19:35, what could an army of angels do?

We’ve talked at the beginning of this series that Vancouver Island is a spiritually dark place. We all know that this spiritual darkness can press in on us, discouraging, misdirecting, trying to get us to compromise or give up.

I’ve felt that pressure, as have you. But this week as I read Jeremiah 20:11, the Spirit of God used that verse **to refocus me** on the truth of who my God is – he is like a mighty warrior. He who is with me is greater than…the one who is in the world.

The Spirit used that verse **to stir up courage in me**; to convince me to walk close to Jesus as he leads my life.

Our lives are to be lived as a response to who God is and to what he has done.

Those who step out to attempt for God things that are beyond them, are those whose eyes are filled with Jesus and his glory.

We are going to sing two songs in closing.

The first one is entitled “Today.”

God makes himself known to us because of his love for us.

He makes himself known to draw us into relationship with him, and then as we walk with him he continues to make himself known in order to deepen that relationship we have with him.

Our worship is not just the songs we sing, it is also the life we live as a response of love to our Savior’s overture.

Let the words of this song be your prayer.

As the team finishes the song and continues to play, pray.

**Acknowledge who God is - the Wonderful Counselor, the Everlasting Father, the King who reigns forever, the Lord of heaven’s armies.**

**Then affirm - we will spend our lives on you!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**

Next song: This is Amazing Grace.

Who breaks the power of sin and darkness, whose love is mighty and so much stronger
The King of Glory, the King above all kings

Who shakes the whole earth with holy thunder and leaves us breathless in awe and wonder
The King of Glory, the King above all kings

*[Chorus:]*
This is amazing grace, this is unfailing love, that You would take my place, that You would bear my cross
You lay down Your life that I would be set free, oh, Jesus, I sing for all that You've done for me

*[Verse 2:]*
Who brings our chaos back into order, who makes the orphan a son and daughter; the King of Glory, the King of Glory

Who rules the nations with truth and justice, shines like the sun in all of its brilliance
The King of Glory, the King above all kings

*[Chorus]*

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, worthy is the King who conquered the grave - 3x
Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, worthy, worthy, worthy Oh

The Blessing

John 17:3: This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

We are to delight ourselves in him.

We are to keep our eyes fixed on him.

We are to think upon his great mercy and grace.

If eternal life is knowing the triune God as Jesus prayed in John 17:3, then knowing God is the greatest pursuit of our life.

God has made the first move – he has made himself known.

This is why we are to cooperate with the Spirit when he comes to live in us, and in no w

Look again at Psalm 19 – this time at verses 7-14.

God tells us he has made

The night before he died, Jesus had an extended conversation with his Father in the presence of his disciples in the room where they had just eaten the Passover supper. John 17:3 records these words of Jesus: *Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

According to Jesus, not only can God be known, but there is a quality and type of life, that is experienced by the person who knows God through Jesus.

All of us here are alive. That is an obvious observation.

So when Jesus spoke to his disciples the life he was referring to wasn’t their physical life

Jesus described this quality of life as being “eternal.” It is life that begins now and will never end.

From the opening verses of the book of Genesis, God reveals himself as the Creator. The book of Romans, chapter 1, explains actually what it is that God made known about himself through what he created – verses 19-20.

‘What may be known about God is made plain.’

The One who is invisible does not hide from humanity.

What does God reveal about himself through the created world?

‘He makes known his invisible qualities.’

God doesn’t just reveal that he exists.

Through the creation he reveals who he is.

Specifically, God reveals his eternal power and divine nature.

The vastness, the complexity and intricacy, the inter-connectedness, along with the beauty and design of this world and the creatures that live in it, reveal the wisdom, creativity, and power of God.

Because God has made himself plainly known, no one will be able to make the defense when they appear before him, “I didn’t know you existed.”

God is knowable, because he makes himself known to us.

There are things that humans strive after – wisdom, influence, riches, to name but a few. Through the prophet Jeremiah God told humanity this is what is most important, **9:23-24**.

Understand and know me.

But God wants us to know him rightly.

To Jeremiah he said this is who I am – the Lord who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on the earth.

And then God added a very significant phrase – “for in these I delight.”

So why then are so many people oblivious to the reality of God?

Romans 1 answers that question.

Our human nature that has been thoroughly permeated by sin, suppresses our ability; it spiritually blinds us, so that we cannot see what God has so clearly revealed about himself.

But within every person there is a God shaped vacuum that cries out to be filled. Humans are inherently religious. This is why, we create gods in our own likeness or in the likeness, as Romans 1:23 says, of birds, animals and reptiles.

**Can God be known?**

The atheist would say no – advocating that you can’t know something that doesn’t exist. The agnostic would say I’m not sure. The Buddhist would say that’s the wrong question. The goal of life, however many times one has to relive it, is to reach nirvana, which is nothingness.

The Muslim would say Allah can be known if you perform the five pillars of Islam – the confession that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is his messenger; prayer five times a day facing the Kaaba in Mecca; the giving of 2 ½ percent of one’s assets to mosques or Islamic charities; fasting 30 days each year during the month of Ramadan, and making a pilgrimage, during one’s lifetime, to Mecca.

Christianity is unique in that’s its answer is a resounding yes.

God can be known because God has made himself known.

There is a difference between the world being divine and

What we think about God matters. Why? Because what we think about God will influence how we relate to him.

**Hymn**: Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise

This is a great hymn.

When you sang the second verse

* “Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,

Nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might?”

what picture of God came to mind?

Is it possible that some people,

maybe even you, have a picture of God

as this all-powerful being who sits impassively in heaven,

coolly observing all that happens here on earth?

Do people, even you, see his responses

towards individuals and events on earth

as being sedate and unemotional

– oh, that’s good; oh that’s bad.

What we are going to consider this morning

is that the God revealed in Scripture

is an expressive God.

He created you and I in his likeness,

he created us with emotions because…

he himself has emotions.

**Celebratory**

In the first chapter of the Bible,

we read that as God stepped back each day

to admire what he had made, he would exclaim:

“This is good!”

And when God had completed his work of creation,

he celebrated, and with great pleasure cried out,

“This is very good.”

God smiles. He sings. He laughs with pleasure.

He takes great delight in his creation and his creatures.

My question is – is that how you view God?

Zephaniah 3:17.

Do you find it incredible that God reveals himself

as taking great delight in you?

God’s face breaks into a huge smile as he watches you;

he jumps to his feet when he sees your responses of obedience,

or your acts prompted by love and faith.

He passionately loves you; he unabashedly exclaims in song,

“This one is mine and I am so proud of them.

Aren’t they incredible?”

Isaiah 25:6-9.

When time comes to an end,

God is planning to throw an enormous party.

The context for this party, the reason for celebrating, will be:

- the destruction of death.

- the completion of salvation.

- the tender care of God for his people.

This celebration will be a banquet

* where the Lord himself will prepare

the best of meats and the finest of wines.

It won’t be a hot dog roast, but an extravagant feast.

Revelation 19:9 describes this feast as

“the wedding supper of the Lamb.”

At this banquet we will eat and rejoice,

exclaiming with laugher and shouts and words of praise,

 Look at our God!

 He has done what he promised – we have been saved.

Can you believe it – we have been made righteous

– body, soul and spirit!

How incredible is our God!!

Have you thought of God in this way?

Or is your perception of him being stretched and challenged?

Jesus who was God the Son in human flesh;

Jesus who revealed to us what the unseen God was like

* was a man who knew great joy;

who celebrated, and who attended parties to the extent

that the religious leaders made this accusation of him

– Lk. 7:34.

Jesus sent his disciples out on a mission trip. When they returned home he celebrated the Father’s good work of salvation that had been realized through them. Luke 10:17-21. Jesus was ecstatic with joy over what his followers had done.

At the Passover meal Jesus talked with his disciples about a number of matters. One of which was his longing that they experience his joy in their lives. Jn. 15:11. When he later prayed for them, Jesus specifically asked the Father to grant to them the full measure of his joy. Jn. 17:13

If the Triune God celebrates and rejoices and laughs with pleasure, should not his people, who’ve been recreated in his image and called to imitate him, do likewise?

Where do we celebrate?

Dt. 16:11 – we are told to rejoice **before** the Lord.

Ezra 6:19-22 – we are told to rejoice **with** one another.

Our worship times are to be times of celebration! But not the only times.

How do we celebrate?

Ps. 5:11-12 – with singing

Psalm 150 – with the making of music and dancing

Zeph. 3:14 – with loud shouting and heartfelt exuberance

Nehemiah 12:43 – with sacrifices

When do we celebrate?

Phil. 4:4 – always!

Not only is God expressive in that he celebrates, he also grieves and experiences sorrow. Jesus was identified in Is. 53:3 as a man of sorrows.

When he came to the tomb of Lazarus he wept because of what his friend suffered and because death was an aberration – an enemy.

When he healed a deaf man who could barely talk, Mk 7:34 says, “He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said, “Be opened!” Why did Jesus in his spirit groan before he healed this man? Because it was never meant to be this way. When the Father, Son and Spirit created, it was not their intent that our bodies be broken and twisted. Jesus’ spirit was grieved by what sin had done.

When the Pharisees relentlessly pestered him with nit-picky questions and traps hoping to discredit him, Mk. 8:12 says that before answering them, “(Jesus) sighed deeply…” Hardness of heart grieved his spirit and deeply saddened him.

Before he entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey to the acclamation of thousands, Jesus stopped on the Mount of Olives and…wept. He wept over what would happen to the people as a result of their choice to reject him. He lamented that they would be left as sheep without a shepherd.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, sorrow and grief pressed down upon him to the point of suffocation. The Living Bible translates Mt. 26:38 this way – “My soul is crushed with horror and sadness.” Lk. 22:53. For a brief moment it was the will of God the Father which permitted darkness to be unleashed against Jesus. Is. 53:10.

Never do we read of Jesus putting on a fake smile, or suggesting that in the face of sorrow a person should brave up and exert a little will power.

As we would imitate God, the things that grieve his heart grieve ours as well. We too weep in the face of death, but not as those who have no hope. We too know sorrow because of diseases that ravage the body. We too experience deep sadness when we run into individuals who stubbornly refuse to believe God is, or whose lives are devastated because of the sinful choices they have made. And as it was with Jesus, the Father will give permission for evil to strike at us. While all things do work for good, that doesn’t mean we won’t know pain and disappointment and tears.

Where else do we see evidence of God’s expressive nature?

God gets angry.

Twice Jesus threw dishonest businessmen and women out of the temple.

This response of his was not a flash of temper that he later regretted.

It was calculated. It was rationale. It was righteous.

Think about it. When have you ever seen a money loving person leave behind both the goods they were selling and their cash? These sellers were faced with only two choices – clear out of God’s house or face the wrath of his Son. The fact that they chose to clear out should tell us something about what it’s like to face God’s anger.

But this aspect of God’s character is grossly misunderstood. Anger is not the only emotion that God expresses, but many think it is. They believe we’re only one step ahead of getting royally smacked by God. Do something wrong and God will cause you to lose your job, get evicted from your apartment, fail an exam, or come down with a life-threatening disease.

This view, however, is not consistent with how God reveals himself in Scripture.

Psalm 103:8 – “The Lord is…slow to anger.”

It doesn’t say God never gets angry. It says he is slow to get angry.

God’s fundamental inclination towards us… is loving kindness.

He holds back his anger as long as he possibly can. It is not his first response. And when he does become angry, his anger is legitimate.

What angers him? Deliberate rejection of Jesus. God can be and wants to be your loving Father; Jesus can be and wants to be your Forgiver and the Leader of your life.

But if we reject him, we will discover that he is the most fearful foe imaginable. Nobody go up against the anger of God, and win. But nobody has to. In Jesus’ life and death, God’s lovingkindness has completely paid for our sin, so that all who turn from sin to Jesus are forgiven.

As you and I would imitate God, it is important to state that our inclination towards each other and others is the inclination of lovingkindness. We are not to be people who easily fly off into a rage. We are not to be people who are just waiting for a person to mess up so we can pounce on them. We are called to be kind as God is kind. But there are times when we will feel a righteous anger over sinful actions committed by those in rebellion towards God. But even in those times we need to be mindful of the warning given in Romans 12:19-21 – “leave room for God’s wrath.”

In the debate that is sweeping Canada regarding the question of redefining marriage to include same-sex unions, people of faith will feel a righteous anger. But guard against that anger being directed towards condemning those who practice homosexuality and those seeking to write new laws. Argue your point with passion, but do so without vilifying the person. Scripture tells us to overcome evil with good. Rom. 2:4 says it is the kindness of God that leads to repentance. I believe you can fulfill both and still make your point.

There is one more quality of God’s expressive nature that we need to consider. God is expressive in his gentleness towards us. He knows how we are made – he understands our frailty, and he deals with us accordingly.

Is. 40:10-11. This all powerful God gently leads and cares for you and I.

His care is described to be like that of a shepherd carrying a young lamb.

Is. 42:3. When you deal with a bruised reed or a smoldering wick, you have to be gentle so as not to break them or to have the flame go out. That’s a picture of how God gently deals with you and I.

Jesus’ disciples could understand his anger, even his celebratory nature, but his gentleness frustrated them. Why did Jesus stop to play with kids? Why did he hold them on his lap and talk to them?

And when lepers approached him, why didn’t he just wave a greeting and head off in the opposite direction? Why did he touch them? Why did he embrace them?

Many of you have experienced harshness from people – parents, grandparents, siblings, church people. You need to be reminded that God will deal with you in gentleness.

As those who would imitate God, we need to be gentle in our action and in our words with one another. I don’t think anyone here has been physically beaten up by another person in this room. But you have wounded others by the words you have spoken to them or the words you’ve said about them to others. In word and in action we are to be gentle with each other. That means we are to think before we speak. Your frank advice may not be needed. The best thing may be to keep your opinion to yourself. You and I need to learn to listen twice as much as we speak. And when we do speak, to practice Col. 4:6 – “Let your conversation be always full of grace…”

As we’ve focused on God’s expressive nature, my intent has been to help you and I understand sin in a fresh way. If you follow Jesus, its not that you step out of line when you sin, it’s that you violate a relationship and betray a trust. You don’t just disobey; you dishonor your closest friend. You don’t commit an infraction; you shake your fists at the one who has extended nail punctured hands to save you. You don’t just break a rule, you break God’s heart. Your actions and responses affect God.

The other thing I’ve want to impress upon you is that life is meant to be lived in color, not black and white.

Some of you ought to celebrate a lot more than you do. You need to do more dancing, attend more parties, engage in more laughter, have more fun. You need to experience joy that enlarges your soul – God created you to celebrate.

Others of you need to cry, instead of pretending that everything is ok. There is no set time for how long a person is supposed to grieve over the disappointments of this life. And there is no expectation of God’s that to grief is somehow wrong. God invites you to fully express your sorrow, and for this community to weep alongside of those who weep.

Some of you need to learn to express appropriate anger that results in energy directed towards transforming action. Don’t bury your anger and risk it turning into bitterness.

While others of you may need to experience moments of tenderness.

If we are to adequately represent God to our generation, then we need to accurately know our incredible expressive God.

I internalize anger, some of you externalize it.

Some people when they laugh, shake and roar, others just smile.

Some are quick to cry, others only do so in private.

Is God impassive – unmoved by ecstasy or sadness?

Or is he expressive, demonstrating a whole range of emotions?

Your view of God does influence how you’ll live life – in black and white, or in color.

As a kid, I used to watch TV in black and white and thought it was great – I didn’t know any different. But once I saw color, there was no going back.

was it not that we would live life in