

WORSHIP

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Back to Basics: Why be Presbyterian?

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1 Peter 1: 3-12

Over the past few weeks we have been asking big questions that we have to answer to explain why we are in the place and why we do what we do here. In this series Back to Basics, we began asking....

What is the purpose of Church? Pen preached that, “The church was sent in to the world with a promise and an invitation to be a people shaped by resurrection in a world that is hungry for good news. So that we are a light for the world Jesus came to save.”

Why be a member? Ana reminded us that, “We belong to one another and when we live with that in mind we can proclaim that we belong to God. We share in joy and sorrow, we lift each other up and we show up for one another because our lives depend on it.”

Why do we worship? We heard that we need to worship. “Worship brings us closer to the source of life, it fills us up with the Spirit that can heal and restore and reset us so that when we leave this place that we can be God’s people in the world that Christ came to save.”

Why do we reach out? “What we hope to accomplish when we reach out is to make our faith visible, our truth in Jesus visible. God is not satisfied with brokenness and suffering. We reach out to move toward the grace filled world that God intends.”



So today we are asking Why be Presbyterian?

I felt that this may be a secret final test just before my installation. But I will let you know I am ready.

Yet, as is true to our tradition, let us once again turn and listen to God's word for us to. Our new testament Text is from the Book of 1 Peter the first chapter beginning at verse three. Listen for the word of God...

1 Peter 1: 3-12

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you rejoice,[a] even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, 7 so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire— your faith may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8 Although you have not seen[b] him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, 11 inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory. 12 It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look!

One question I never received in my years attending church, going to seminary, through the ordination process, and then the call process to come here was, "Why



are you Presbyterian?” The simple honest truth would be “I didn’t have a choice.” Last week in the confirmation class we were studying what it means to be Presbyterian. In preparation for today’s sermon, I asked them “Why are you Presbyterian?” The general concensus was because this is where their parents drove them on Sunday morning. I think by the end of our time together, we started to formulate deeper answers. Yet, before asking the confirmation class why they were Presbyterian, I had to be sure of my own answer, this class keeps me on my theological toes. I had many examples of how my biblical knowledge and understanding aligned with the essential tenets of the reformed tradition. I was ready to point to different passages in the Book of Confessions and how that also reflected my personal faith and understanding of God. I was prepared for the Grand 8th Grade inquisition.

Yet, in each academic defense I prepared, I kept thinking of people who showed me all these things and demonstrated the eternal truth. I am Presbyterian because Mom and Dad took me to church each week because they knew the importance of worship. They knew that worship reminds us of who created us and loves us. I love Presbyterians trust in the authority of Scripture, because my Sunday school teach showed us that scripture reminded us that we were saved and watched over. That we can interact with God and we have a place in the big story of God and the world. I am Presbyterian because when I had a choice to not to go to church in college and after, and I decided to sleep in, when I felt something missing and found a church of my own, the people of First Presbyterian reminded me that there was always a place for me in God’s house no matter how long we have been away. When I had the chance to not be Presbyterian I still kept coming back because of the example set before by so many people in my life. So, for me, I am Presbyterian because of the people God has placed in my life.

We each have our own reasons why we are Presbyterian. I have heard for some, they are Presbyterian because it allowed them to heal after being hurt by their previous faith community. Others have said, I am Presbyterian because I googled churches close to me and it happened to be Presbyterian. Some people wanted to try something different from what knew or a take break from the



everyday roar. I bet we have had television viewers who have been flipping through channels stopped and wanted to see what this was all about. People have called themselves Presbyterian because they like what we think the church is, or the purpose of our worship, or the way we serve, or the way we care for each other. And at times, I think for all of us, we are at a loss of words why we are Presbyterian, which I honestly think summarizes best. Because the truth is, the real reason we are Presbyterian is because God has called us to be. We may say I am Presbyterian because of the people, or the music, or the fight for justice, BUT that is really the how. That is how God has reached us. The true reason is, "This is God's will and we have responded." Reverend Christopher De La Cruz, who came to the Presbyterian church in Seminary, summarizes it so well, "God has placed me here, in the PC(USA), now. And all I can do is faithfully join my Presbyterian brothers and sisters to do all I can do to, as the Westminster Catechism says, glorify God and enjoy God forever. Christopher understood it was his choice but God had let him to be a Presbyterian.

As Presbyterians, one of our defining characteristics is belief in God's providence. The doctrine of Providence is the conviction that God "is personally active in nature and in history and in governing not only the affairs of the world but also the affairs of human life." It uplifts the idea that we have a relational living God who interacts with us in all aspects of our lives. God has ordered the world and humanity for God's will. Accepting providence as an act of faith is a way of deepening and enlarging our own Christian life. It is through an understanding of providence that we can understand why we are Presbyterian. God has ordered it so that we are so. That this is way we worship God and understand God. God's providence is the way we understand if we are Presbyterian since birth or joined at another time in life or just felt the call to be with this congregation to day and be to Presbyterian for this brief time together. Being Presbyterian is what God has ordered for us. So, I'll say it again, I am Presbyterian b/c I didn't have a choice. It wasn't because that is how I was raised or pressure from outside. It is because God called me to this belief, these people, and this tradition so that I could know God and respond.



In the epistle of 1st Peter, we see the opening can be a reminder to us as Presbyterians what are central beliefs are. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” We open with praise and worship to God. The beginning of our responsibility to God in our tradition. To love the Lord our God and glorify God’s name. Then the author jumps directly in to a reminder of the Good News, the news we are to proclaim in each moment of our lives and in all our actions. We are told “By God’s great mercy God has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and in to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading kept in heaven for you.” We are alive and a new creation through the salvation of Christ is proclaimed in the Church universal and connects all of us, no matter the tradition or denomination. Proclaiming Christ makes us Christian.

As the writer continues we hear these words, we are “being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation” This protection that is mentioned can be interpreted as what later theologians would call providence It is an aspect of faith that we can rely upon and find comfort in. Providence guides us to God who is the source of our comfort and the promise of salvation. Providence is our protection. So, if we are Presbyterian by providence. We are Presbyterian as an act of faith and as an act of trust in our living God who loves us. Being Presbyterian, for us, is a way in which we respond to this Good News and a way we continue to move forward in recognizing our acceptance by God.

The author of 1 Peter then begins to tie this long story of God’s relationship to us to the first of God’s chosen people and the prophets of Israel. God’s will for the prophets of old led them to share the promise of the coming of the Messiah and the gift of grace to God’s people. God’s Providence leads us to share this same spirit filled grace and the new news that Christ will come again. Providence led the prophets to serving God in their own context and speaking to their people. They weren’t led to being Presbyterian but like us they hear God’s call and God’s ordered way led them closer to God. As Presbyterians, we celebrate the long tradition we share. From the covenant of Abraham, to the first churches Paul wrote to, to the early church theologians and theologians of the reformation to each one of us here today. What each person heard from God was true to them



and true to their time. Being Presbyterian isn't the only way, Christ is the way. But for us right now, God has ordered it so that we are here in this way just like the prophets were with the people of Israel following God's will. Their tradition led them to God just as ours does now.

I said earlier that for me, God's providence has called me to being Presbyterian because of the people in my life. I cannot leave this pulpit today without mentioning my grandmother and her influence on me here today. And I mean that by being able to say I am a Christian and I am a Presbyterian, by being able to wear a stole and being able to stand in the pulpit and be installed at First Presbyterian. Eleanor as some of you know her, or I'm sure you have heard me talk about her as Memommy. She understands best why we are Presbyterian, how God's will guides our lives. . She has shown so many people what trust in God's call looks like. She trusts in God's providence for her life and responds in kind. For her trust and devotion, meant to be a member here and a Presbyterian who proclaimed the saving grace of Christ and let everyone she meets know about the ever-present living God who calls to us in heart and mind.

Like all good Grandmothers of a certain era, she had a few framed cross stitch and needlepoint samplers in her house. The one I remember best was of a prayer we always said before meals. It was an action of subtly hospitality because if you forgot the prayer or were visiting and unfamiliar with it, you could open one eye and read the words as the rest of the family recited the prayer. It said "for the hand that feeds us, for the heart that loves us, for the son that saves us, we give you our thanks O Lord. Amen" But then one day a relative had heard a line that belonged in the prayer that we didn't know about. "For the Providence that Guides Us." Over the years there were some various attempts at including it in the family prayer. But like most Presbyterians we were slow to change at times and it wasn't in needlepoint so how were we to learn it. Yet, now as I think back, I think how significant that line is to that prayer in light of the whole story of God and us. The hand that feeds us, God provides all to us. The heart that loves, for God loved the world that God gave his only son. For the son that saves us, salvation is a gift from Christ, and the providence that guides us, God's will and



protection calls us to God. That is the story of our relationship with God and in part what it means to be Presbyterian.

So why are we Presbyterian? We are Presbyterian because God has called us to be so. God has called us to this place, to this work, to these people, to God. We are Presbyterian because that is how we are living out the fact that God has claimed us. That is the why. The how is the spirit leads us by God's words to us in a still small voice, by the people who have come before us or those who are beside us in this time, by the not so random fact that you are here today in this sanctuary, watching us online, or watching us on television. Because God's providence has called us to this church, these people, this work, and to God's self. We say yes to God and yes, I am Presbyterian. So, let's end with this prayer once again:

For the hand that feeds us,

For the heart that loves us,

For the providence that guides,

For the song that saves us,

We give you our thanks, O Lord. Amen.

