**“Corporate Worship and *Real* Facetime”**

Most scholars believe that Psalms 42 and 43 were originally one Psalm. They are among what we call the “Assent Psalms,” (Pss. 120-34) psalms the Israelite pilgrims would sing as they made their way to the holy city. In this/these psalm(s) the psalmist is lamenting the fact that he is, for some reason unknown to us, away from God and his house of worship. He longs for the day when he will again draw near to God. He begins with these words, “As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God, when shall I come and appear before God” (Ps. 42:1-2). He is understandably saddened as he reminisces about those blessed occasions of worship – “Those things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in process to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival” (Ps. 42:4).

Though Old Testament saints were indeed commanded to keep the Sabbath day holy, they did not go every week to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices and enjoy the fellowship one with another. Yet the psalmist found quite a blessing meeting with the Lord and his people when he did make the trip. Our situation is different than theirs. We are not only to keep the Sabbath day holy; we are commended both implicitly and explicitly to come together on the Lord’s Day from week to week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Heb. 10:24-5). Moreover, assuming we are not physically or providentially hindered in so doing, we experience such a blessing when we do attend corporate worship. That, of course, means that we miss a blessing when we are not able to attend.

Though of course even this is subject to change, we are doing our best to keep up some semblance of “corporate” worship with our “drive-in worship services” each Lord’s Day. Other churches are having “virtual worship” which is the wisest and best thing for most of them to do. Yet the fact of the matter (If we didn’t know it before now, now we know it all too well.) is that neither virtual worship nor drive-in worship is ideal worship. The Lord intended his people to come together each Lord’s Day in person and have real, serious, biblical “facetime.” Though you cannot reasonably draw any other conclusion from the New Testament, the “greet one another” passages make it all to clear. Though we might, and biblically so, substitute a handshake and hug for a holy kiss (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26), you cannot escape the fact that the Lord intends his people to see one another up close and personal and be encouraged by it from week to week. Try as we might to do what we can, anything short of in person, perhaps closer than six feet, corporate worship rightly leaves us feeling that something is lacking.

A preacher feels this. In 1 and 2 Timothy Paul is speaking to his young protégée Timothy about how, among other things to conduct public worship. In 2 Timothy 4:2 he commands Timothy, “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2 ESV). As most of you know I am a firm believer that there is a place for open air preaching. In fact, I still believe it is a much-neglected tool of biblical evangelism. I have preached several times at the Bristol Motor Speedway to hundreds of strangers as they passed by, even drawing the attention of some. Yet strictly evangelistic preaching is far different than preaching to a congregation in corporate worship. The biggest reason I have always frowned upon churches that hire big name preachers to pipe in their sermons to large gatherings of people who have never met them is that the personal aspect is lost. The Lord especially uses the *personal* aspect of preaching. Ideally, it is the man who visits you in the hospital or home whom you should be hearing and seeing each Lord’s Day morning. Preaching is to be interactive, even if not audible on both sides. The Lord uses that eye-to-eye contact (as well as lack thereof) between parishioner and pastor.

But what about singing, you ask? After all, we are singing unto the Lord not unto men; we are to glorify God, not entertain people. True, true, true. The vertical dimension is primary in worship and that is true in singing as well. Yet the Lord himself intends a horizontal dimension as well. In Colossians 3:16 the apostle exhorts his readers thusly, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, *teaching and admonishing one another* in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col. 3:16 ESV). Did you catch that? As we sing biblical songs (by the way that is but one reason they must be *biblical*) we are teaching and admonishing one another. Paul says pretty much the same thing in different words in Ephesians 5:18-20. One of, if not, the main thing I have missed most about us not being able to gather in our sanctuary these days is hearing you sing. We are doing the best we can do; yet it is certainly not ideal. The Lord blesses us by hearing one another sing and the sound of us all singing *together*.

Though there are certainly other aspects of our present worship services that are less than ideal, let me mention one last thing - partaking of the Lord’s Supper. We were due to have the Lord’s Supper last Sunday, April 5th; we could not do that because of our present situation. While theologians dicker concerning how often we are to partake of the Lord’s Supper, it is clearly to be taken by God’s people together as the church. In 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, Paul clearly teaches that the church should be partaking together of the Lord’s Supper as one aspect of corporate worship. Over and over he speaks of them coming together as the people of God. While there may be circumstances and ways in which churches might minister to home bound members by taking the Lord’s Supper to those members (elders present, the preaching of the Word, etc.), the normal way of observing the Lord’s Supper is together as the people of God enjoying *communion,* not only with Christ but with his people.

The “son of Asaph” who wrote Psalms 42-3 clearly missed corporate worship and longed to have it back. How much more ought we in this era of greater grace miss our being able to “come together” up close and personal, hugs and handshakes, eye-to-eye, face-to-face, bread and wine (though perhaps not a common chalice). While we worship the Lord the best we can during this season, may our experience in this season give us a longing to come together as soon as possible, with a greater commitment to doing so, as well as greater appreciation of the blessing we enjoy. May we be able to sing with David, “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!” (Ps. 133:1 ESV)