

## PENTECOST: SHARING NEW LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

**The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**August 22, 2010**

**Isaiah 58:9b-14**

**Psalm 103:1-8**

**Hebrews 12:18-29**

**Luke 13:10-17**

### **Pleasing Worship**

There is a great deal of variety today when it comes to worship styles. One can experience that variety not only by visiting churches of various denominations, or different churches within the same denomination, but in some cases by attending selected services offered by a single congregation. It is not uncommon to read the sign outside a local church and find times listed for the “Traditional Service,” the “Contemporary Service,” and the “Blended Service.”

Much time, energy and money is put into creating worship experiences that are pleasing to congregations and designed to attract and retain visitors. Worship leaders are added to paid staff. Worship teams major portions of the service. Varieties of musicians are engaged. Multimedia technology is employed.

Most of us will agree that there is no one correct way to worship. Just as our Creator has built variety into every aspect of the universe and instilled different likes and desires within each of us, it is only natural that the manner in which we worship will take on different forms based upon both individual and cultural diversity.

In the Epistle lesson, the writer to the Hebrews does remind us, however, of some important considerations that we need to keep in mind when it comes to worship. I particularly like the rendering of the *Good News Translation*, “Let us be grateful and worship God in a way that will please him, with reverence and awe” (12:28b).

Note first that the object of our worship is God; thus, first and foremost, our worship is to please God. When folks say they have stopped going to church because they don’t like the music, or they don’t get anything out of the sermon, or perhaps the service is too long, it is probably time to remind them that worship is not so much about them as it is about God. Note also that the writer defines, to some extent, the kind of worship that pleases God – worship on the part of those who are “grateful” and who approach God “with reverence and awe.”

The reading from Isaiah exhorts us to “treat the Sabbath as sacred” and “not pursue [our] own interests on that day” (58:13a, *GNT*). True (pleasing) worship is an act of thanksgiving, expressing our gratitude to the One in whom “we live and move and exist” (Acts 17:28, *GNT*). Our approach is to be one of reverence. The psalmist reminds us to,

“Praise the LORD our God, and worship at his sacred hill! The LORD our God is holy” (Psalm 99:9, *GNT*).

And now we have that interesting word “awe.” The words “awe” and “awesome” have come into common use to describe everything from the movie we saw last night to the hamburger we are eating. Interestingly enough, the Greek word here rendered “awe” is found only this one time in the entire New Testament, and it is used to describe how we are to approach God in worship!

That final verse of Hebrews 12, actually the conclusion of the sentence begun in verse 28, is sobering: “because our God is indeed a destroying fire” (12:28 *GNT*). While some preferences in worship may satisfy the congregation and bring in the visitors, at the heart of true worship is only what is pleasing to God.

This week’s Reflection was prepared by The Rev. Thomas R. May, Director of Content Quality Assurance for the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship at the American Bible Society.

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**This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Israel** – with thanks to God for lives touched through our Scriptures, and for the Fellowship’s support during the war in Gaza and the South of Israel; and with prayers for Scripture distribution at festivals, in the streets, as well as through congregations and bookstores, the effectiveness of our multimedia center and website, and that our testimony may convey God’s Word and love to refugees and immigrants; **Arab Israeli Bible Society** – with thanks to God for answering prayer during the war in Gaza and South Israel and a smooth move into new premises; and with prayers for building bridges with the community and fruitful collaboration with the churches; **West Bank & Gaza** - with thanks to God for the renewing and transforming spirit in the Society and for a wonderful, committed team; and with prayers for protection and regional stability, more strategic partnerships and ministry opportunities, opportunities for peace-making and bridge-building, the distressed people in Gaza, the proclamation of God’s Word, and that from Jerusalem, we can keep the Light of the Lord shining for the whole world.

Activity Corner: “A Psalm of Praise”

Supplies needed: Bible; 3” x 5” index cards; pens or pencils (drawing paper and crayons or markers for young children).

Gather in a circle and read Psalm 103:1-8. Consider reading it as a litany, designating someone to read each verse and inviting the group to read verse 1 as the group’s response after each of the verses 2-8. The psalm reminds us that we are to praise the LORD with all our being (verse 1); praising the LORD with one’s soul involves the totality of one’s being. Verses 2-8 speak of God’s kindness and love – all his “benefits.”

Identify what the psalm says about God’s goodness and then discuss how worshipping God, according to your faith tradition, demonstrates responding to God’s love and

praising God with “all your being.” Encourage each one to copy Psalm 103:1 on an index card and to keep the card as a reminder throughout the week to keep on praising the LORD. Invite everyone to write on the back of the card ways in which they live out that verse. Younger children may be encouraged to draw a picture that expresses how they worship and praise God. Conclude by reading Deuteronomy 6:5, offering a prayer of thanksgiving that expresses loving God with all your heart, soul, and strength, and singing one of your favorite hymns of praise.