

Scripture: 2 Samuel 24:18ff

Four years and one week ago I preached a sermon that was actually a loud lament. I did not weep from the pulpit, barely, but my family did, at home, that week.

In that sermon I said, “In spite of the science and the apocalyptic risk Trump denies global climate change. His hatred of ‘the other,’ or ‘the stranger,’ is xenophobic. It means he wants to ban Muslim immigration and deport millions of non-documented immigrants and has no sympathy for the issues that have ignited the ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement. His statements preferring Jews to blacks as employees, or denying that Obama was born in America or is a Christian, his mockery of people with disabilities, and his pathetic and demeaning treatment of women, his goading of supporters to violence against protestors at his rallies—these actions are not just impolitic, they are immoral.”

Four years later, Trump has not changed course at all. So, now I am sitting on pins and needles when it comes to Tuesday’s election. I am a dual US and Canadian citizen. I do my part. I voted in my riding’s byelection this week, and donated to my favorite candidate’s campaign.

I have also donated too much to congressional candidates, one of whom (Brian Berghoef) is a good friend, has preached in this church, and stands an excellent chance of turning his district away from Trump.

I also voted Democratic, not because I can’t imagine a world where I might ever vote for a Republican, but because of Donald Trump’s heartlessness, lying, racism, violence against women, and fear-mongering. I voted Democratic because Trump’s science denial has led to the deaths of tens of thousands—if not hundreds of thousands—more Americans than necessary.

Ironically, I am presently teaching a course on “Media and Me,” where one of the themes is moderation when it comes to use of social media and screens. I confess that I have not been able to follow my own advice. I can’t put down my phone’s news scroll. I am riddled by anxiety.

So, lately I’ve lost focus. I’m moving to a new home, next week, in Bowmanville, just to make things a bit more interesting, & working on my Canadian corporate taxes for the IRS even though I don’t live there. I’m just not seeing the big picture anymore—just polls & packing box numbers.

What would a proper focus be? Not, I think, a reality-denying expectation that God will snap her fingers and make it all better for me. Not a private sense of optimism and hope, as if my feelings could change the course of history. What would a proper focus be?

Well, I am going to give you an unexpected answer. In part, to be perfectly honest, I am giving you this answer because I was looking for something—anything—in today’s text, chosen

long ago, that would make some sense given my anxieties and preoccupation. I've added some more scripture to fill out the text's theme.

But here is what I came up with. When sorrows and sea billows roll, I cling to the idea that it isn't my job to command the wind and the waves—which is impossible, anyway. I'm not God. No, when sorrows and sea billows roar my life depends on giving my all to sailing the ship the best I can. To that end, I offer my entire life, my all, in worship of God—which means, primarily, loving my neighbour.

Let's see how I got there, via this Old Testament story.

A devastating plague—on a per capita basis worse than COVID-19—has decimated Israel. Last week I explained that the only conceivable way that the Israelites could get their heads around this plague was to blame God for it. But they also exonerated God by believing that God repented of the evil he did.

I'm not going to repeat that sermon now. It's on our web page. What I want to talk about is what David did and said after the plague.

According to this legend, David went to the place where he believed the angel had stopped killing people. David was so thankful for this mercy that he built an altar to God exactly there, on the threshing floor of Araunah.

Now Araunah offers to give David the land, the animals and the wood David needs to make a sacrifice of gratitude for the end of the plague. Araunah is just happy that his family and his workers have been spared.

But David refuses to let Araunah make this huge religious donation. Because, says David, "*I will not offer to God something that has cost me nothing.*"

This is where my focus should be. The costly sacrifice of my all, as little as that is, even if it can make little difference, in thanks for the gift of life. And our presence at Sunday worship ought to serve as a symbolic down payment for how we plan to give our whole lives, always—whatever we're doing—as a sometimes costly sacrifice to God.

The Bible fleshes this insight about the all-of-life cost of worship over and over again. Consider the apostle Paul, who says, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God" (Rom 12:1) and, "live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work" (Col 1:19).

An Old Testament prophet fleshes out what this means for rich people living in a time of poverty and political unrest: "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him (merely) with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?" Micah answers his question about worship with a resounding, "NO."

“What does the Lord require of you?” asks Micah. “To act justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (6:8).

Worship is your whole life. Again, Paul says, “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable . . . keep on doing the things.”

Now, I have often said that I don’t want my sermons to become twenty-minute-long nags. I don’t want to repeat, over and over, that you have to be active in the political square and volunteer at church, and inform your corporation’s buying decisions by your desire to be just and good to foreign workers and on and on if you want to be a good Christian. I really worry about nagging. Life as worship should be a trained, but often unconscious, reflex on account of gratitude that lives in you, eagerly offered in spite of the cost, as with David.

How is this possible? Well Life as costly worship is full-bodied, like a good costly wine. I have a wine like that in the cabinet right now—Lohrs Cabernet Sauvignon. I buy it mostly because it was my brother’s favorite wine. A review of this wine promised, “Layered aromas of black cherry, currant and blueberry are accented by an authentic barrel-aged bouquet of dark chocolate, cocoa powder, and roasted coffee.”

Now, if truth be told, when I taste that wine with an eye to teasing out some of those flavors, I can almost do it, barely, a little bit, with lots of room for error left over. I do catch a hint of the berries and coffee—I think.

But it doesn’t really matter that I can’t single out this or that flavor, really. The quality of the wine isn’t the coffee in isolation, or black cherry in isolation. Lohrs Cab is a full-bodied wine, a single thing—as are our lives, in spite of all their complexities. Lohrs Cab is a full-bodied wine, a single thing—as is our daily worship.

None of us bring the same recipe to our lives as worship. But we all aim for a pleasing bouquet we can offer God and neighbour, whatever it is we do for work or fun or family or public square.

Anyway, one year and one week ago I preached a sermon that was actually a loud lament. I didn’t weep from the pulpit, but my family wept, that week. Four years ago, I was devastated. Donald Trump was the new president of the United States.

In the years following, though I’ve been politically active, I’ve realized that no single thing I do is going to make the critical difference to what happens this coming Tuesday night. Still, I do what I can to help the ship of state, whether in Canada or the States, with all that I am.

Why, if nothing I do makes a huge difference by itself? Because life is worship.

And what is worship? Not attendance at a Sunday event but a mindfulness you carry with you wherever you go. Not rules or doctrines that trip you up, but a spirit that always reaches out for the other. Worship is not a “to-do” list, but eyes wide open to the good in life so that gratitude will inspire all I do.

Worship in dangerous times isn't always cheap. But it is always trying to do what you can, for the love of God and good of your neighbour. Worship happens wherever you happen to be, doing your small part with all that you are, to bring this hurting world to a safer harbor.