

# ***Reflections from a United Methodist Pastor***

*November 8, 2020*

*Lesson 10*

## **Worship in the Synagogue**

Luke 4:31-44

Jesus had a rich ministry in a lot of settings: mountaintops, street corners, deserted places, lakes and rivers, small towns, big cities, but this week's text reminds us that our Lord kept his ministry rooted in traditional places of worship.

Luke 4:31 reports that Jesus went every Sabbath to the synagogue. Verse 33 tells of a wild experience that happened during one of those synagogue visits. Verses 43-44 include Jesus' declaration that his preaching ministry was to continue in the synagogues.

I do not want to suggest that God is only present at 11:00 AM (Eastern Standard Time, of course) on Sundays, but I do want to remember that systematic gathering with the worshiping, teaching community was part of the example that Jesus set for us.

Do you recall how it was last spring when, because of the coronavirus, churches closed and did not offer in-person worship services? We tried, but there was something missing when we were not around squirming children, restless youth, exhausted parents, rested elders.

Late last winter, I preached somewhere I had not been before, the annual preaching mission at Whiteville United Methodist Church in North Carolina. I got curious, so I went through my files to figure out how many different United Methodist churches I had preached in throughout the North Carolina Annual Conference. Gasp! I remembered small, rural congregations. I remembered English Gothic sanctuaries. I remembered fellowship halls with folding chairs. I remembered contemporary designs. I remembered simple plank buildings. I remembered steepled brick towers. Two hundred seventy-five different gathered settings for worship. (No, I didn't get moved to new appointments that often! My appointments included some conference-wide responsibilities that took me all over the place.) Every one of these settings had one thing in common: people coming together to worship God. It is at the core of who we are. Even when illness or disability keeps us away, our hearts and our minds go to those gathering places.

As we thought about last week, the worship of God can erupt in all kinds of places, but as Jesus showed with his own journey, there is a gift of grace when the community of worship comes together.

**Prayer:** As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "O for a thousand tongues to sing."

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