

This series is about asking what does it look like to make a journey that involves '*coming home*' in all its different expressions. Physical, emotional and spiritual. So I want to start this series, by suggesting that every journey we ever make, carries with it, three ever present realities.

The first, is the TRUTH of INTENTIONALITY.

To even begin a journey requires us to be intentional about it. And whatever journey we find ourselves on - we have to be intentional about cultivating the fortitude and perseverance to see the journey through.

The 2nd reality is our DESIRE TO ENGAGE AND EMBRACE THE JOURNEY

There is no journey worth making if we're not going to fully engage and embrace it.

We all know how easy it is to travel without noticing. It's what our last sermon series was all about.

It's only by engaging with everything we encounter – and embracing everything we experience along the way – that can we savour the journey - glean wisdom from the journey – and grow and **become** a different person through the journey.

The third reality is the need for A SENSE OF THE RIGHT DIRECTION

If we are journeying to towards any place, we feel is 'home' - we need to know the right direction to travel. There may be unplanned changes along the way - necessary changes along the way - and even some wrong turnings along the way. But we do need to be anchored in the sense of '**what are our true bearings**'?

SO as I thought and prayed on how to begin the journey of this series, it became clear to me that there's only one place we can begin.

What does it mean for us to be a people COMING HOME TO THE HEART OF WORSHIP?

Because as people of faith - whatever the journey we are currently travelling- be it a journey of transition, of work, or study. A journey of grief, or of reconciliation: whatever our journey - all of them have to be centred in the heart of a **worshipful life**.

And to be centred in this posture of worship, there's a call to be committed and intentional. And to fully engage and embrace this posture of worship. Because it's the only way we can be sure the direction we are spiritually travelling in, is anchored in the Way and Truth of our Triune God. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In a sentence.

The more we '*come home*' to the heart of worship, the more we '*come home*' to the heart of God.

And isn't this the truth of Paul's words to the Romans.

12 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—this is your true and proper worship.

Now **Urge** is a very Paul word. It means to 'press' to 'push hard'. It's where we get the word URGENT of course. Paul is asking for a response of intentionality.

Paul is saying to you and I today – be intentional about bringing every part of your life before God in a posture of **grateful worshipful surrender**. Because this is what God delights in. It's holy and pleasing to God. As Eugene Peterson puts it

Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. This is your true and proper posture of worship.

And after the challenge of Paul, we get the challenge of Jesus.

In John 4, Jesus gives us another dimension of what 'coming home to the heart of worship' looks like.

23 “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. 24 God is Spirit, and God is seeking those who worship Him in spirit and truth.”

Jesus tells the woman at the well and you and I today, that God is seeking people who are **intentionally** open to seeking the Spirit’s presence and guiding. Who are intentional about seeking God’s Truth as revealed in Christ. God wants worshippers with an expansive authentic faith that transcends the limitations of man-made boundaries and tribal dogma.

**And this brings me to the crux of where I really want to land this today.
This is WHY the challenge for you and I to cultivate a life centred in worship,
Truly MATTERS. Why it’s urgent.**

Because the hour has been coming and now truly IS, when the whole concept of TRUTH is as precarious as it’s ever been. Humanity has always been susceptible to the seductions that take us in the wrong direction away from Gods way and truth - but with the siren song of AI technology, social media algorithms, echo chambers and all the rest ... knowing “*What is truth*” has never been more slippery.

Even if we are genuinely seekers of ‘truth’ - the wisdom to know what’s real and what’s fake has become harder than ever to discern. ‘Truth’ can be manipulated and presented in a multitude of confusing ways.

But this is where the Church has a GIFT that we should intentionally treasure.

And I want the heart of this sermon to extol the beauty and the importance of this gift for our worship lives. In a word - LITURGY. Let me explain.

"Liturgy" comes from a Greek term meaning **"work of the people"** and for centuries upon centuries the Church has **shaped its beating heart** on the rhythms of a liturgical life. This is framework of worship that takes us on a journey of core practises that help shape and form our spiritual lives and faith formation. You and I engage with them every Sunday here at St George’s, and the Worldwide church has a liturgical calendar year that tracks the life of Christ. We journey through **Advent, Christmas, Lent, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Pentecost, Trinity Sunday and what’s called Ordinary Time.**

These liturgical practises recalibrate our attention and form our hearts. And it’s done through the sacred rhythms of beautiful music, prayer, confession and Holy Communion. Through architecture, icons, and art; through pilgrimages, monasteries and retreats: through fasting and feasts. And of course, by being **intentional** about gathering on Sundays. And how blessed are you and I to have such a rich ecology of practises we can engage with?

How many times have you engaged in any of these practises and felt something inside you moving in a different direction? Something of the Spirit whispering to you a different wisdom truth.

Did you notice that straight after Paul URGES us to offer all of our lives to God as an expression of proper worship, he follows up with these words.

2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Paul knew that only way we can test and know God’s truth for our lives - is by centring our lives in the heart of worship.

This is the beauty and the gift of our LITIRGICAL WORSHIP PRACTICES.

Because the deeper we engage with these spiritual practises, the more we are able to recognise how the patterns of the world are taking us in a different direction to the one we are called to travel. To recognise how they are subtly conform us to a different spirit and truth that’s not of God.

The author James K Smith coined a term for these patterns. He called them, ‘**Cultural liturgies**’.

Smith argues that humans are primarily "desiring creatures" shaped by what we love. But we know this because Jesus told us. **"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."** Jesus tells us that ultimately, we will become what we most love and desire. **We become what we worship!**

Cultural liturgies of advertising, social media, the shopping mall, consumerism and celebrity culture, can seduce and tempt us into a different journey.

Personally, I like the term Professor John Vervake uses to capture the essence of these cultural liturgies. He calls them the liturgy of B.S. Sometimes blunt expressions are the best expressions.

B.S is anything that tries to distort the truth, confuse the truth, hide the truth - and ultimately degrade the truth. And in doing so steals away the fruits of the spirit that bring us life.

**Worship of God is HOW we unmask these cultural liturgies
How we release their claim on our hearts.**

Because worship engages the whole person—body, mind, and emotions. And these embodied spiritual practices help us stay grounded in God's reality. They train our attention on God and expand our imagination to be recaptured by the beauty of the Gospel. Here's some examples.

- **Cultural liturgies encourage us to be polarized - an us v them mentality.**
- **Worship of God forces us out of our private bubbles to be a people capable of loving 'across our differences'. It exposes our cultural blind spots.**
- **Cultural liturgies encourage us to be captured by the "tyranny of the now," driven by 24-hour news cycles, instant gratification, and short attention spans.**
- **Worship of God connects us to the perspective of our larger Eternal story. It reminds us that human history has a direction and it heads towards restoration and hope.**

Whatever our life circumstances, they help us to be being grounded **IN** God - guided **BY** God – and gravitate **towards** God. In and through Jesus Christ.

This is our gift. And I know just how much this has changed and shaped my life since I came to faith. And still is.

And I do sometimes get asked, what inspires me most in my own faith-worship journey. There are many things of course, but far the most significant is this.

I've constantly been inspired by the faithful presence of people who just commit to **'turning up'** for this journey of Faith and Worship.

I have known and I know at this moment, people in this St George's community who have suffered some of the really deep wounds that life can inflict, and they still carry the scars.

I know people who are struggling with enormous challenges on a daily basis. Some of them feel unfair and cruel.

People with health challenges, physical, emotional and spiritual. People struggling with their close relationships and family dynamics that are a daily stress. People with extremely testing work and financial anxieties. And some people coming to terms with deep and painful grief.

And yet, they courageously (and I deliberately use this word) they courageously make the **commitment** to turn up for the journey of faith and worship, week in and week out. They walk this journey with a long obedience in the same direction.

It's the wisdom truth of our Psalm for today.

Psalm 1. The people who are like trees planted along the riverbank who bear fruit in each season of life and have the resilience not to wither - are the ones who are intentional about delighting and meditating on God's Law. The Truth, Beauty and Goodness of God, day and night.

By intentionally practicing these rhythms of worship, we develop a spiritual stamina. We learn to live with hope and patience in a reactionary world.

By coming home to the heart of worship, we come 'home' to the heart of God.

- So what does the challenge of Paul and Jesus look like for you and I individually - and as a worshipping community here at St George's?
- How can you/we intentionally engage and embrace the gift of these Liturgical practises that's been the beating heart of God's church down the centuries?
- How can you/we go deeper.

Let me offer these encouragements.

The first is wisdom from Eugene Peterson and his beautiful book - *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*:

"Worship is an act that develops feelings for God, not a feeling for God that is expressed in an act of worship." — Eugene H. Peterson,

Peterson taught that worship is an act of discipline that *forms and deepens* our feelings for God, rather than waiting until we feel like it. **We can act ourselves into a new way of feeling - much faster than we can feel ourselves into a new way of acting.**

Let's be honest, If we only worshipped when we felt like it, how often would we really worship?

And on this final note of intentionality, can I make a plea.

We begin the service at 10am and I confess to feeling a tad disappointed when we're not all gathered ready to begin our worship journey *together*.

And I know there's so many things that can make us a little late and it's inevitable this will happen. That's Ok. I've been there myself.

But in the deepest spirit of grace and love that I can convey, - can I request that we try as much as possible to be intentional about **coming home** to the heart of worship for a 10am start as one community in Christ.

Our second encouragement is the wisdom of these words.

When I am away from Liturgy for too long, I find I burn for it now, for the steadiness of the calendar, the 'words' that ring out in repetition. When I return each week, I am coming home again. Liturgy is written into my flesh, sinking into my skin and my spirit. - Angela Carlson

Isn't this, a beautiful reminder to all of us – that in the relentless busyness and distractedness of our lives - to be intentional about truly engaging and embracing the beauty and the gift that's been passed down to us.

Worship doesn't just teach us *about* God; it trains us to *love* God. It reorders our desires, so we begin to love what God loves.

Coming home to the heart of worship- to come to the heart of God.;