

The Way of Love: WORSHIP

**Gather in community weekly to thank,
praise, and dwell with God.**

*When he was at the table with them, he
took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave
it to them.*

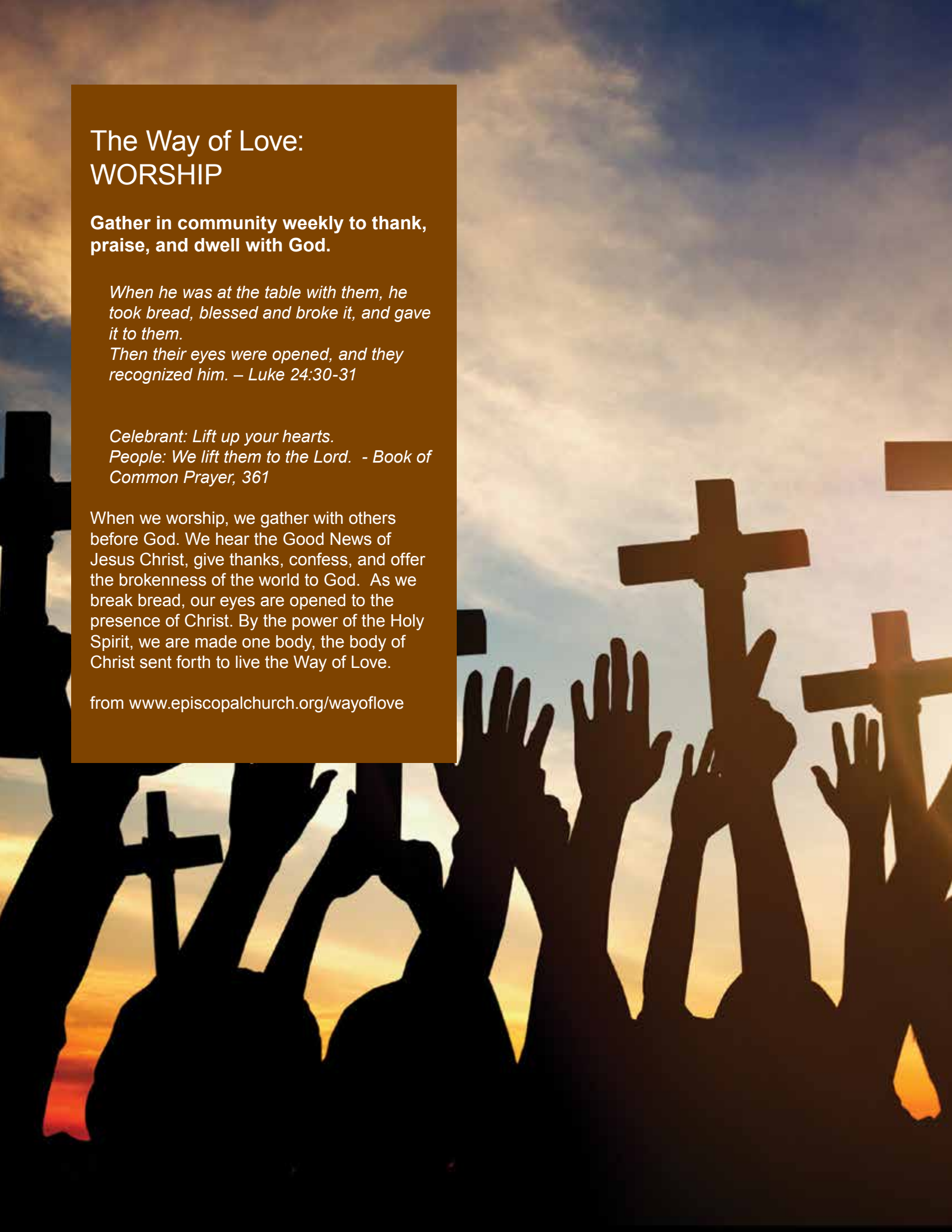
*Then their eyes were opened, and they
recognized him. – Luke 24:30-31*

Celebrant: Lift up your hearts.

*People: We lift them to the Lord. - Book of
Common Prayer, 361*

When we worship, we gather with others
before God. We hear the Good News of
Jesus Christ, give thanks, confess, and offer
the brokenness of the world to God. As we
break bread, our eyes are opened to the
presence of Christ. By the power of the Holy
Spirit, we are made one body, the body of
Christ sent forth to live the Way of Love.

from www.episcopalchurch.org/wayoflove



I Thee Worship

This past October, Lucy and I celebrated eight years of marriage. Being Lucy's husband is one of the forms of life into which God has led me, and it is through my vocation as her husband that I have learned much of what I know about living a life devoted to worshipping God.

In the marriage service of the 1662 edition of *The Book of Common Prayer*, there was no exchanging of rings. The only ring was one the man gave to the woman. After the vows, when it came time for the ring, the man said to the woman, "With this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow . . ."

For the sake of space, I won't dwell on the problematic gender dynamics evinced in the 1662 marriage rite. Regardless, these words are beautiful and are true of my experience as a husband: "With this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow . . ." The ring is a symbol of a total and unequivocal offering. All my worldly goods, even my body itself – they're no longer simply mine because I am no longer the center of my universe. My body and my wealth have found a newer, richer home in the presence of one who is not I.

That line, "with my body I thee worship" is probably the sexiest thing ever said in a church outside the Song of Solomon. But those words are not simply about sex. Rather, they acknowledge that we human beings do everything with our bodies: run errands, fold laundry, wash dishes, walk the dog. Marriage places new disciplines and demands upon us. These disciplines and demands change our physical experience of the world. I wash dishes I didn't dirty; I fold clothes I don't wear; I try to go to bed and rise when Lucy does; I no longer ride scooters after dark because it's dangerous.

This is no less true of "all my worldly goods." None of my paycheck is simply mine; it's ours. My stipend as the vicar of St. Elizabeth is our only income, yet Lucy (who is a full-time student) need not ask before buying a book or getting a haircut. The mutual commitment of worldly goods made in our marriage precedes either of our income status. On payday, I don't "give Lucy my money." I'm not giving Lucy

When we acknowledge the worthiness of God, when we worship God, God's desires begin to lay upon us new gifts, new disciplines and demands.

continued on page 14

• *I Thee Worship*
from page 13

“my” money because that category has been subsumed by our sacramental relationship: it’s all already hers, too.

As a spouse, I order my embodied life and material resources so as to acknowledge, and even proclaim, the worthiness of Lucy’s desires. Her desires are a gift to me, as is their unique claim on my life. They safeguard me from the illusion that I am the center of my own universe.

We can finally begin to see how these words from the 1662 marriage rite might be instructive for worship, not just for husbands but for any Christian person.

To worship God is to acknowledge God’s worthiness and the worthiness of God’s desires. As our creator, God’s worthiness is absolute. To worship God is to ascribe ultimate worth to our Creator. (The words *worship* and *worth* have the same root.) When we acknowledge the worthiness of God, when we worship God, God’s desires begin to lay upon us new gifts, new disciplines and demands.

God’s desires are essentially two, and they constitute a total claim: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30-31). This claim is also unique: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:3). We believe that God, the Father of Jesus, is our God. We forsake all others.

Therefore, our bodies and worldly goods are no longer simply our own. We kneel in prayer; we use words instead of fists when angry; we listen to each other; we visit the sick; we offer each other food and affection; we receive this bread and this wine; we open our home for small group; we pledge financially to our church. All of these are ways we acknowledge the worthiness of

God’s desires – ascribing ultimate worth to our Creator with our bodies and worldly goods, receiving as gifts the disciplines and demands of living in God’s presence.

The truth that we belong to God precedes every other decision: should I have this surgery, should I travel to see this family member, can we really afford to tithe? Our bodies and our worldly goods are always already God’s property. God’s desires are determinative.

It’s no wonder that the Eucharist involves so much physical engagement and so many objects. We bow during the procession as the cross passes. We offer money and bread and wine on the altar. God gives us the body of His Son. Even the simple act of praying in words we have not written ourselves acknowledges the truth that Christ’s commitment to the Church, and our vocation as Christians, precedes our every decision, even our speech.

Not long ago the bishop visited us on Sunday morning at St. Elizabeth. We witnessed several confirmations, receptions, and reaffirmations. All of us renewed our baptismal covenants. We promised to “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself.” We promised to “continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers.” We promised to “strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.” We promised to “proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ.”

These are not little promises. It’s as though we all looked at God and said, “with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow....”

Powerful vows. Imagine God's pleasure, God's Divine Joy, at having the promise of your whole life glittering on the gentle finger of heaven. Imagine your own unending joy, for as long as you both shall live, the life everlasting. *R*



For Discernment and Reflection

- What communal worship practices move you to encounter God and knit you into the body of Christ?
- How will (or do) you commit to regularly worship?
- With whom will you share the commitment to worship this week?



Daniel is vicar of St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church in Buda. Reach him at danielstelizabeth@gmail.com.