



How Worship Practices Form Us for Ministry in Daily Life!

A Life of Faith Initiative Resource

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How are the things we do at worship related to ministry in daily life? Often people have a difficult time making connections between the things we do in the worship service and the things we are called to do when we leave the church building after worship. In fact, however, everything we do at worship is directly related to forming us for a way of life as Christian people in the world. As we participate in liturgy we not only are worshipping God but also engaging in rituals that immerse us in the person and way of Jesus Christ himself, who makes us members of the body of Christ and engraves upon us Christ's very own character.

In order to grasp how worship practices are truly also life practices, we need to begin with a very basic conviction: *God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit is the Primary Actor when we gather for worship.* When we define liturgy as "the work of the people" it is easy for us to lose sight of the most important Lutheran conviction informing our theology of worship. "We" are not the primary actors when we gather for worship; instead God in Christ is the Primary Actor at worship who is doing something "to us." Worship is less about what we are doing for God and far more about what God in Christ is seeking to do to us. As we immerse ourselves in each of the worship practices in the liturgy we are formed distinctively for Christian life practices in the world.

What is God trying to do to us? God is actively forming us in a pattern of life that corresponds to the way of Jesus Christ. As we participate week after week in each element of the worship service, God etches upon us the character of Jesus Christ, which we are sent to live out in our relationships with others in our daily lives. Repetition of the distinctive parts of the liturgy imprints upon us both a way of being and a way of serving the neighbors God gives us in the arenas of our daily lives: family, work, school, local community, and world.

In order to see what God is up to at worship, it is useful to think carefully about each element of the worship service and make explicit how each of these worship practices is formation for life practices.

Invocation: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The naming of the Trinity at the start of the liturgy reminds us that everything we do in the worship service involves the activity of this Triune God, who promises to be present among us, meet us, and transform us according to the things we do at worship. Both the naming of the Holy Trinity and the practice of making the sign of the cross link us inextricably to our baptismal identity in Christ, the source of our Christian vocation for service to neighbors in our ministries in daily life.

Confession and Forgiveness: Certainly, confession of sin and receiving forgiveness involves admitting our fault and responsibility for sinning, even as we receive God's actual forgiveness and pardon from God for Christ's sake. This worship practice, however, also instructs us in a life practice. We learn that admitting our mistakes, asking for forgiveness, and practicing reconcilia-

tion is a way of life for Christian people every day. We confess our sins and receive forgiveness from God in Christ at worship, and thereby we learn to practice confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation in our relationships with other people in our daily lives. We confess our sin and receive forgiveness, “so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name” and “live and serve you in newness of life.”

Thanksgiving for Baptism: An alternative to Confession and Forgiveness at the opening of worship is the rite of Thanksgiving for Baptism. Thanksgiving for Baptism assists us in learning to follow the instruction of Luther that we are called to renew our baptism each new day. Because ministry in daily life in the arenas of family, workplace, school, local community, and globe all derive from the promises and call of Jesus Christ made to us at your baptism, when your life was united to Christ’s death and resurrection, the frequent use of Thanksgiving for Baptism can serve to deeply connect you to the lasting significance of baptism for how you live out your baptismal vocation in service to neighbors in daily life.

Gathering Song: There are many different themes in the various songs we sing at worship. The lyrics of a particular hymn immerses us in remembering God’s saving deeds and connects these with what it means for us to be a community of persons dedicated to following the way of God in Christ. The music of the hymn penetrates our souls, affecting us at a level far deeper than conscious thought. Think about your own favorite hymns and how they have shaped your faith and life as a Christian. Favorite hymns can provide us topics for talking about the promises of God with other people and inspire us to live according to the words we have sung. More than anything else, the very act of singing hymns teaches us that the entirety of our lives is meant to be a song of praise to God each and every day. Everything we do in life is to be offered as a song to glorify the God who creates, loves, and sustains us.

Kyrie: “In peace let us pray...Lord, have mercy.” This ancient prayer sung at worship teaches us that we worship a God of peace and mercy. We pray peace for the world, for the church, and for the unity of all. As together we sing this song of peace, asking for God’s mercy, and as we repeat these petitions week after week, God is forming us into a people of peace and mercy, who are becoming the very peace and mercy of God for which we pray in relation to other people every day of our lives.

Song of Praise: We sing: “Glory to God in the highest and peace to God’s people on earth” and “This is the feast of victory of our God. Alleluia.” Where do we discover courage and hope for the living of our lives, especially in a world filled with struggle and death? These particular songs of praise draw us into communion with Jesus Christ, the Incarnate, Crucified, and Risen Son of God, whose victory over the principalities and powers means God’s life finally prevails over all the forces of suffering and death. We are formed through these hymns to be people of peace, courage, mercy, and hope for facing all the struggles and losses we experience in the course of our lives. These songs of praise instruct us that the way of Christ is the way of the cross and resurrection, not only at worship but for living our lives day by day in a world of suffering and distress. We are called by the Incarnate, Crucified, and Risen Christ to take up our cross and follow him into the places of suffering in our local community and world.

Prayer of the Day: This prayer asks God in Christ to form us as people in accordance with the times and seasons of the church year and the particular Bible readings assigned for the week. Each prayer makes a unique request, asking God to grant us particular gifts for the living of our

lives.

Reading of the Word: As we rehearse the Psalms inherited from the Jewish people, making them our own songs and prayers, and as we listen to God's Word in the readings for a given week, the Spirit transforms these ancient words into a Living Word addressed to our own lives and context. Through the reading of Scripture, God promises to meet us as the Living One who makes effective God's promises in Christ as Good News for our lives and who forms us through these stories to be people of the Word. In all the sea of words that compete for our attention in our daily lives, at worship we claim that this is the Word of eternal life. This is the Word that provides orientation amidst all the other worldly words that pommel us and try to persuade us. By this Word Jesus Christ makes us his own not only on the day of worship but for the rest of the week and the rest of our days.

Sermon: The preacher serves as God's messenger for proclaiming God's Word, making connections between what this Word has meant to people of faith in previous generations and what this Word means for us today. Preaching is an awesome task. The preacher shares a message with the hearers that functions both as Law and Gospel. The sermon as Law forces the hearers of the Word to examine their lives and recognize their need for God and God's gifts. The sermon as Gospel announces the Good News in Jesus Christ to deliver to hearers the very gifts Christ desires us to receive: mercy, love, forgiveness, grace, peace, hope, and eternal life. The sermon as Living Word of God sets hearers free *from* every form of bondage that prevents us from being the persons God created us to be. At the same time the sermon as Living Word of God sets hearers free *for* lives of service to the neighbors God gives us in each of the arenas of our daily lives—in our families, workplace, school, local community and world. Because we are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone, our eternal salvation already has been secured and we need not be preoccupied with our eternal destiny. Thereby we are free fully to engage the needs in the world around us as we live out our Christian baptismal calling for the sake of others.

Creed: "I/We believe..." The words of the Apostles' or Nicene Creed are confessed at worship in communion with Christians who have lived and died for these convictions in past generations and in solidarity with all Christians throughout the world today. The creeds serve as our pledge of allegiance. These are the things for which I stand as a Christian. These are the beliefs according to which I intend to live and, if necessary, these are convictions for which I would be willing to die, as did the martyrs of old and as do Christians yet today under difficult circumstances. Confessing the Creed grounds us in the core convictions for which we stand and challenges us to live according to these commitments every day of our lives. We are called to be a member of the one holy catholic and apostolic church, practice the forgiveness of sins, and trust in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting through all the challenging circumstances of our daily lives. The threefold form of these Creeds deeply connect us to our shared faith in the Triune God. Of particular importance: each time we confess the Apostles' Creed we are reconnected directly to the confession of faith made at the time of your own baptism, our shared point of departure for living out our baptismal vocation in service to others in all ministry in daily life.

Prayers of Intercession: "...let us pray for the church, those in need, and all of creation." The prayers of intercession—which include petitions for the mission of the church; for the well-being of creation; for peace and justice in the world; for the poor, oppressed, sick, bereaved, and

lonely; for all who suffer in body, mind, or spirit; for the congregation; for special concerns; and for the those who have died before us—certainly are about drawing all these concerns to the attention of God and asking God’s benevolent intervention. As we utter these prayers, in a real sense we are participating in a cry of lament in solidarity with all the needy and suffering ones of this world. At the same time the prayers of the church are for us a mission statement. If we dare to beg God to address these things for which we pray, at the same time by our act of formulating these prayers we declare that these are also the very things to which we are committing our own time and energy as Christian people. For example, if we pray for the hungry or for the healing of Mr. Johnson, we are not just turning these things over to God but are also asking God to align our own energies toward feeding the hungry and offering ministry to Mr. Johnson. The prayers of intercession provide a direct connection between our worship and the service to which we are dedicated in our daily lives. Moreover, as often as we join in praying the intercessions, it is not only we who are doing the praying. In fact as we raise our prayers we are joining our prayers to Christ’s own prayers for the life of the world. The Spirit of God joins us to Christ’s prayer for all creation.

Passing of the Peace: “The peace of Christ be with you always. And also with you.” Passing the peace is one of the most tangible moments in the liturgy for linking a worship practice with a life practice. As Christ gives us his peace, a peace beyond all understanding, we receive this peace from one another at worship and become those who are called to pass this peace on to others beyond the sanctuary into the streets. At worship we learn Christ’s way of peace and share this peace with the neighbors God gives us in our spheres of influence throughout the week.

Great Thanksgiving and Communion: “The body of Christ, given for you. The blood of Christ, shed for you.” In the Great Thanksgiving we recall the gift of Christ’s death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead and all the benefits we receive from our God as a result of Christ’s generosity. “It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise...” Throughout the Eucharistic Prayer we rehearse God’s saving deeds done on behalf of God’s people and we follow Jesus’ own command to eat the bread and drink the cup, in which sacrament of eating and drinking Jesus himself promises us his real presence. In the Holy Communion, which designates not only the sharing of the meal but the entire worship service, Jesus Christ is really present to present us his gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. Here is a meal, we claim, where all people are welcome. Here is a meal, we trust, where there is enough for all. At our celebration of the Lord’s Supper we receive a foretaste of the eternal feast to come in God’s kingdom. The life practices embedded in the Holy Communion are too many to name. At the very least here we learn to be a people of radical hospitality, welcoming all people as our neighbors, as Jesus Christ has welcomed us. At the very least here we learn to be a people of radical generosity, sharing with our neighbors the love of the One who first loved us. By our participation in the Great Thanksgiving and Holy Communion, we are formed to be a people whose entire lives are lived in communion with others and with God’s creation as a Great Thanksgiving: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1).

Blessing: “The Lord bless you and keep you...” Liturgy concludes with God’s benediction. The Triune God, whom we have encountered in the worship service, blesses us as we scatter from our gathering. God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit accompanies us with all blessing as we

prepare to enter next into the worship service which are our daily lives, bestowing the blessings we have received upon the neighbors we encounter there: “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40). As we have participated in the practices of worship, we have been formed in the life practices belonging to the members of the body of Christ for the life of the world.

Dismissal: “Go in peace...” As you have been fashioned at worship to conform your lives to the way of Christ Jesus, now you are sent to be the people of God according to this pattern in every role and relationship throughout the week. With the peace of God we are sent: to serve the Lord, to share the good news, and to remember the poor. As we are sent to do works of mercy for our neighbors, we also carry the promise: “Christ is with you!” As you have become the forgiveness of God, the praise of God, the word of God, the intercessions of God, the peace of God, the hospitality of God, and the food of God at worship, go now to be the forgiveness, praise, word, intercessions, peace, hospitality, and food of God in your ministry in daily life. Amen. Let it be so! Thanks be to God!

Conclusion: When we join in the fourfold pattern of worship—Gathering, Word, Meal, Sending—we are truly already now entering into that selfsame reality which Jesus Christ named the kingdom of God. The space and time coordinates of this world intersect really and truly with the space and time coordinates of what Jesus Christ named as God’s kingdom: “...your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.” This happens at worship! The eschatological kingdom of God that we await in hope of future glory comes breaking into our lives already now, forming us at worship as people of God’s kingdom, whose life together as the body of Christ is made to conform to the very character of Jesus Christ existing as community. In a very real sense worship makes us to become the kingdom, the shalom of God in service to neighbors for the life of the world.

A robust theology of worship insists that God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit is actively involved imprinting upon us a Christ-like pattern of life through the practices of worship. This requires: 1) renewed imagination for the ways God employs the familiar elements of worship as means of grace for transforming our lives according to the way of Christ and 2) our active participation in doing the liturgy with expectancy about what God is doing to us. The perceived gap between worship and ministry in daily life can be bridged when we come to understand how the practices of worship are each really a rehearsal of life practices to be lived out in neighborliness to others each day of our lives.

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