



Worship the Lord

No. 37, July 2009

Sharing worship ideas with WELS pastors

Articles on twelve key worship concepts may be valuable for analysis in a pastors' study group, board of elders, or worship committee. As WELS parishes work with these concepts, our worship will be enriched for the sake of both members and guests. It will be faithful to Scripture, to our Lutheran heritage, and to the challenges and opportunities of being 21st century followers of Jesus. Pastor Doug Tomhave's entire ministry has been in missions and outreach: assigned to plant a new mission in Verona, WI; pastoral advisor for LWMS; and appointed in 2008 to the Commission on Evangelism.

Sacraments

"Liturgical Tack-ons or Life of the Church?"

By Doug Tomhave

What do you want?

What do you want from worship? Christian worship should be more... *visual, upbeat, exciting, emotional, practical, personal*. Others just want worship to be over by kickoff, something a late service baptism and celebration of Holy Communion make impossible!

God anticipated these issues and has something to say (the Word) and something to give (the Sacraments). Long before mandatory immersions or ages of accountability, God spoke with water, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Long before Barna and ministry best-sellers advised the church on what "to do" in worship, Jesus said with bread and wine, "Take and eat. Take and drink. This is my body. This is my blood. Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." God gives. His people receive. God's approach to his people has not changed over the years. Ours dare not either.

What does God give?

Let's face it: we Lutherans are simply different from many of the "popular" churches in town. That's not a polemical statement. It's simply true. Confessional Lutherans are different. Our sermons, packed with objective justification, aren't welcome in Reformed pulpits. Our corporate confession of sin and pronouncement of absolution makes many churchgoers shudder. Our doctrinal hymnody brings yawns to faces that prefer "praise" without substantial proclamation. Our creeds are a horror to churches that take pride in their inclusiveness. But what really sets us apart as confessional Lutherans is our focus, use, and dependence on the Sacraments:

Our churches teach that the Sacraments were ordained, not only to be marks of profession among men, but even more, to be signs and testimonies of God's will toward us. They were instituted to awaken and confirm faith in those who use them. Therefore, we must use the sacraments in such a way that faith, which believes the promises offered and set forth through the sacraments, is increased. (2 Thessalonians 1:3)¹

In the first article of this new WTL series, the established *purpose* of Lutheran worship has to do with receiving God's gospel gifts. We sit at God's feet and he serves us with his gospel in its threefold form (Word, Baptism, Supper). God gives, we receive. This is always the direction of

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Sacraments

WORSHIP WORDS TO WRESTLE WITH

Purpose

Sacraments

Tradition

Variety

Catholicity

Accuracy

Excellence

Contemporary

Time

Love

Evangelism

Culture

his gospel. The purpose of Lutheran worship is to maintain this clear focus on Christ.

The words I have spoken to you, said Jesus, are spirit and they are life (John 6:63). As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me will live because of me (6:57 RSV). Jesus Christ is embodied life. And so, whether oral or tangible, the word of the gospel is always the Word of the Son of God, which is by definition also the Word of the Father and of the Spirit. Therefore, the work of the gospel in either spoken or sacramental form always means the same thing for us Christians when we gather for public worship: forgiveness, life and salvation – God’s forgiveness, God’s life, God’s salvation here and now in this dying world in the midst of his congregation.²

From the moment Lutheran worship begins the gospel rings. We invoke the name of the Holy Trinity. These same words, spoken with water at our baptisms, now ring in our ears. With sins laid bare in confession and swept away in absolution, we sit at Jesus’ feet and listen to him speak. After creedal confession and prayer, we are prepared for a spiritual feast that brings with it forgiveness, life, and salvation. Baptism and Holy Communion are anything but liturgical prefixes and suffixes. They are the living God’s means of life!

The life-giving God is present in His church to carry on week in and week out what He initiated once for all at the cross and for every believer personally in Holy Baptism. In the surgical suite of public worship He operates on terminally ill sinners; He brings life out of death. His surgical instruments of healing are His Holy Word and Sacrament.³

In Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the Holy Trinity wraps on a towel, comes down, and serves us. He physically washes and feeds us with the gospel and all of its benefits. God has chosen, instituted, and bound himself to the Word connected to water, wine, and wheat – bringing life to stillborn sinners and feeding the spiritually famished.

Marvel at how God understands the physical needs of his people! He is the Creator and Author of the human senses. He knows how best to satisfy them. When spiritual life was lost in Eden, God decided to reconnect life to the lost in a tangible way. God the Son entered time and space for us. He bound himself to a body for eternity. He even experienced physical death in our place – all to connect us to life. Still today, God in heaven binds himself to the physical. He gives what physically bound sinners need: the tangible. The senses are involved as he creates and sustains faith. God uses the Sacraments to capture the mind and strengthen the heart.

We wash with water and depend on H₂O for life. We are creatures surrounded by and dependent on water. Our earthly existence is splashed with a constant reminder of our Baptism! (Even the atheistic scientist exploring distant planets postulates that if you find water, you will find life.) God brings his life to us through water poured over us. Invoking his divine name and all the promises connected to it changes us eternally. “Baptism now saves you...” Our ears not only hear it, but our senses are confronted with it. We spiritually recognize God’s touch as he reaches down



through the trembling hand of a pastor to transform a child’s eternity. This heavenly bath happens only once, but it is the daily model and power for a life of repentance.

Next is a feast. We eat daily to maintain physical life. Jesus gives us a meal for spiritual life. Our divine Host prepares his meal with familiar ingredients available in most every kitchen. Wine and bread make for a simple meal, but when consecrated with Jesus’ words, they make for a miraculous feeding! All the senses are engaged in the Supper. “Take, eat.” The mind thinks back to the cross, but the tongue tastes Jesus’ body given in the present. “Take and drink.” The nose recognizes the smell. The taste is familiar, but the heart is secured with Christ’s real blood of the new covenant. The ears hear the words “for you...for the forgiveness of sins” as Jesus personally hosts the sinner at his table, guaranteeing him a seat at the endless heavenly banquet. The whole time, the Holy Spirit works quietly, uniting the hearts of brothers and sisters who dine together at this saving supper.

Now let’s revisit our opening list: *visual, upbeat, exciting, emotional, practical, personal*. The Sacraments fulfill these needs – and more – both physically and spiritually. God has chosen to limit himself to these means of grace for good reason, because they are all that we need. God takes his past action in Christ, brings it tangibly into our present, and guarantees our eternal future. The Sacraments give a heartbeat to the Christian and keep the Church of Christ washed and well-fed.

Practically Speaking: What Does This Mean?

This is a good Lutheran question and offers a chance to evaluate our local/personal practices. If God channels all that he has to give in the means of grace, how are we doing at maintaining his means of grace focus?

In Worship

The baptismal font for most Sunday services is purely symbolic. Build on that symbolism, even when there isn’t a scheduled baptism. If your font is tucked away, perhaps place it “in the way” so people can’t help but notice it.

Is the font’s significance diminished by using it as a table for offering plates or individual communion cups?

Consider standing near the font for the Absolution. (See the fourth part of Baptism in Luther’s *Small Catechism*.)

In Preaching

Every Lutheran sermon ought to proclaim the gospel. Let the Sacraments serve that proclamation. The Sacraments provide amazing opportunities to expand on God's presence, faithfulness, power, and our personal justification.

Sacraments are genuinely *real* and *relational*. We serve diverse people of every age and situation. At the font and altar, these differences disappear! There we are truly all one.

In wedding sermons, teach the significance of the Sacraments in keeping Christ at the center of this union.

In Evangelism

For Sundays with an evangelism emphasis, focus sometime on "baptizing them" rather than "go" and "teach" in the Great Commission. Baptism is a vehicle for the Holy Spirit, who is the source of true evangelism. Baptism keeps us focused on who we are and how God equips us for service. Share it!

There may be potential cons for offering the Supper on "big visitor" Sundays. Do the pros for this feast of forgiveness and fellowship outweigh them?

In Counseling

For the one struggling with being forgiven, perhaps a trip to the font is in order. Instead of a table or desk between you and the one struggling, the font physically reminds of God's baptismal promise and speaks to the life of repentance. Along with Luther, the struggling saint can announce against his guilty conscience, "I am baptized!"

When one is plagued with guilt, take him to the altar and offer him the Supper individually. This special opportunity helps to shift the focus from guilt to forgiveness – God's forgiveness placed into hand and mouth.⁴

In Architecture

Will first time visitors immediately perceive that this church centers on a means of grace ministry? This does not mean they will understand it, but questions can open doors.

When planning a remodel or new building, spend good time thinking through the chancel and other ways the Sacraments can have center stage.

- ¹ Augsburg Confession, XIII, The Use of the Sacraments. *Concordia...Reader's Edition*. CPH, 2007. p. 38.
- ² Senkbeil, Harold. *Dying to Live – The Power of Forgiveness*. CPH 1994. p. 119.
- ³ *ibid.* p. 118.
- ⁴ This is not to be a regular established practice concerning the Sacrament. The Lord's Supper is regularly celebrated with the gathered congregation, but we serve the sick and shut-in individually. The first blessing of the Supper is personal – *for you*.

To appreciate and use Baptism aright, we must draw strength and comfort from it when our sins or conscience oppress us, and we must retort, "But I am baptized! And if am baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body." *Large Catechism*, 44

Lutheran Christians often look elsewhere for spiritual food because they haven't been taught to see the rich banquet spread by the Lord of the church in his supper. Harold Senkbeil, *Sanctification: Christ in Action*. NPH 1989. p. 165

Further enrichment from seminary online essay file: six essays from fall symposia by these authors: Cortright, Fredrich, Lenz, Micheel, S. Valleskey, Vieths; and "Sacramental Evangelism in a Postmodern World," W. Johnston.

CWS Ideas and Instruments: August and September 2009 *By Bryan Gerlach*

The Accompaniment Edition CD from *Christian Worship: Supplement* (CWS) provides a wealth of resources for musical variety and enrichment: alternate accompaniments, instrumental parts, and a few handbell parts. A separate Guitar Edition covers most of the hymns. Guitar accompaniment might be used for a middle stanza with choir or soloist even when the congregation sings to piano or organ accompaniment. Suggestions below found on the CWS hymn sampler double CD are noted with an asterisk (*).

Sacraments: Echoing the theme of this issue of WTL, note that CWS includes five Holy Communion hymns and two in the Baptism section.

739 "Baptismal Waters Cover Me" is from the Confession and Absolution section. Consider Pastor Tomhave's suggestion. After singing 739, stand near the font for Confession and Absolution (if this works in your chancel layout). The worship welcome may explain the connection between the hymn and what follows. Since the tune is new, a soloist sings at least stanzas 1 and 3. An alternate accompaniment from the Accompaniment Edition may be used with the soloist for stanza 3. The Accompaniment Edition notes (available online and in the organist's copy) give valuable ideas not only for musicians but also for the preacher.

740-744: four of these communion hymns include instrumental parts on the Accompaniment Edition CD. A setting with additional instrument(s) may be used during the offering. Use the extra instrument(s) elsewhere in the service.

August 2: The introductory notes for this day in the new version of *Planning Christian Worship* (available online) state: "Some have called this day 'Orthodoxy Sunday' because of the emphasis on the pure Word...." Seven CWS hymns are suggested for their thematic connections. Here's an opportunity for worship enrichment during a time of year when some musicians are on a long holiday.

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*752 "In Christ Alone" has become widely known and appreciated. The Accompaniment Edition CD provides an alternate accompaniment. If only a choir or soloist has sung this hymn, or if an adequate piano is not available to accompany the congregation, the alternate accompaniment might serve better for congregational singing.

766 "The Lord's My Shepherd" provides on the CD a simple handbell part along with melody parts in C and B-flat. The tune, Brother James' Air, is one of the more familiar "new" tunes in CWS.

774 "Church of God, Elect and Glorious" provides descant parts in C and B-flat, along with an option for full brass. Since the tune is new, a soloist or choir sings stanza 1 and perhaps also 2 or 3. The descanting instrument or all of the brass play the melody for the congregation's first stanza, adding descant or full brass harmony for the last stanza.

*775 "For Builders Bold, Whose Vision Pure" is one of four new concertatos from the Commission on Worship. The Accompaniment Edition CD doesn't provide instrumental parts; order the concertato from NPH even if all of its musical possibilities aren't used for a service in August. A free recording may be downloaded from wels.net/jump/cwsupplement. While this concertato is grand and impressive, note that the tune is an old Irish folk melody; it works wonderfully with a vocal soloist and piano or guitar. Consider alternating: soloist/guitar on stanzas 1 and 3, congregation with piano or organ on 2 and 4. The Accompaniment Edition notes (available online and in the organist's copy) state: "The traditional Irish melody works well with Stuempfle's text. It emphasizes some key phrases in the text like 'soaring spire' and 'tongues of fire.'" See those notes for an explanation of the unusual tune name.

August 9: 773 "In Unity and Peace" is a perfect complement to the second lesson. The Accompaniment Edition CD provides a beautiful instrumental descant and a choral setting of the refrain.

September 6: *Planning Christian Worship* suggests five CWS hymns to fit the day's lessons. 709 "Christ, Your Footprints through the Desert" offers a simple handbell part. See the Accompaniment Edition notes for ideas on using the handbells. 733 "Rejoice in God" provides instrumental melody parts in C and B-flat. Since this tune is more challenging, organ and instrument play together as final preservice music and to introduce the hymn before a soloist sings stanzas 1-2, without the solo instrument. Then the instrument returns to reinforce the melody for the congregation.

September 27: 772 "When Jesus Came From Nazareth" is an excellent complement for the day's Gospel. *Planning Christian Worship* comments: "We are rescued for life and for life eternal but only in the procession of cross bearers following in his footsteps. Notice that our cross bearing is a necessary consequence of believing... No one cross-less can hide in the procession of cross bearers; no cross, no Christian." See also comments on the biblical Lutheran theology of the cross.

Share these ideas with musicians by emailing a link (wels.net/jump/wtl) or by pasting just the content above into a message.

Baptism. Communion



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New Double CD: In Unity & Peace

This 2 CD set features highlights from last summer's national worship conference. Morning worship on the final day focused on the Church's unity and mission and included these introductory comments in the worship folder. "We give thanks for what unites us as members of a larger church body: a common faith in the Word of God, our mission to carry the Word to the world, and our desire to train pastors and teachers as our representatives in places where we cannot go." The theme of synodical unity gives this double CD its title. It is a blessing to have both doctrinal unity and a shared understanding about the nature and purpose of Christian worship.

How good it is and how pleasant
To live in unity and peace.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
agree in everything you say.

May there be no divisions among you,
but be united in one mind.

For there is one Lord, one faith, one God of us all.

Christian Worship: Supplement 773

CDs may be ordered from NPH after June 22.



High school honor choir at closing service of national worship conference.