



# Worship the Lord

No. 36, May 2009

Sharing worship ideas with WELS pastors

A new series begins with this issue. It will explore twelve key worship concepts. Some articles 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 Aaron Christie serves Faith, Antioch, Illinois. He is the district worship coordinator for the Southeastern Wisconsin District and a member of the team that presents Schools of Worship Enrichment.

## Worship Really Is "Purpose" Driven

By Aaron Christie

What does Christian worship look like? The answer varies according to time, place, culture, and custom. Some worship variety flows from gospel freedom expressed in its cultural context. Other differences in worship practice spring directly from differences in doctrine. Understanding worship's *purpose* will shed light on worship's various *practices*.

### A Plethora of Purposes

A basic principle of architecture is "form follows function." There is a reason why my home has two bathrooms and three bedrooms. It is *living space*. There is a reason why Wrigley Field looks the way it does. It is *spectator space*. The purpose of a building can make for extreme differences in the way the bricks are put together.

Think of public worship as a building. We need a clear purpose. Otherwise, we might find ourselves building a Wrigley when we really needed a family room.

Ask your Bible classes or confirmation students what the purpose of worship is. The answers are almost always along the lines of "praising God, giving thanks, singing and praying together." It is very true that these things *happen* in worship. Are they the *purpose* of worship? Confessional Lutherans can be thankful that we already have an agreed upon purpose for our worship.

Lutherans know that "they cannot by their own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ their Lord or come to him." Faith, forgiveness, the sacraments – all are received. This is most certainly true: *worship is primarily God serving his people with Word and Sacrament*. God gives. His people receive. The Apology states: "This is how God wants to become known and worshiped, namely, that we receive blessings from him, and indeed, that we receive them on account of his mercy and not on account of our merits. This is the richest consolation in all afflictions, which the opponents destroy when they trivialize and disparage faith and only teach people to deal with God through works and merits."<sup>1</sup> Simply put: Christian worship enables people to receive the riches of Christ, and the riches of Christ are proclaimed and delivered through the gospel in Word and Sacrament.

A biblical view of sin and grace, faith and works, Word and Sacrament, Spirit and his Means leads us to view worship as a receiving from God. This is not to say, however, that the singular direction of Lutheran worship is from God to us. If it were, prayers and hymns of praise would

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### WORSHIP WORDS TO WRESTLE WITH

Purpose

Sacraments

Tradition

Variety

Catholicity

Accuracy

Excellence

Contemporary

Time

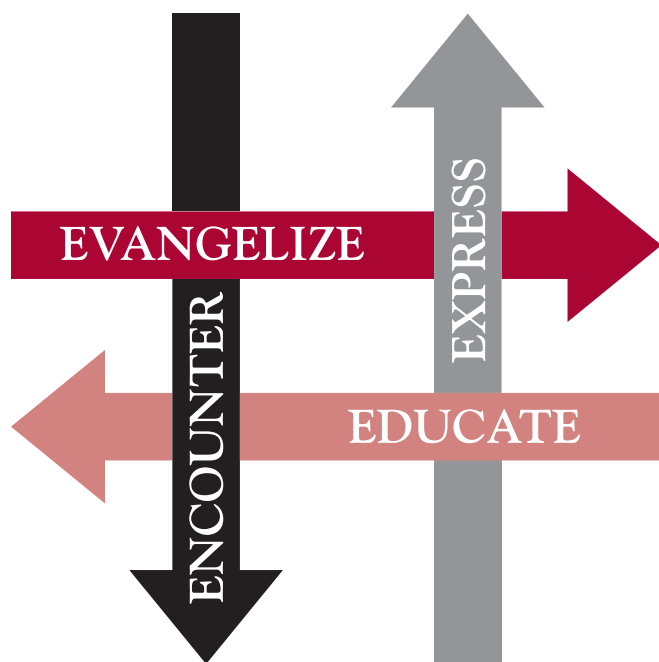
Love

Evangelism

Culture

Purpose

be out of place. Instead, what we receive from God is expressed by several different *dimensions* in worship. Timothy Maschke in *Gathered Guests* provides this helpful chart:<sup>2</sup>



There is a dimension of ENCOUNTER in worship. The transcendent Creator of heaven and earth comes to his creatures through Word and Sacrament. God graciously approaches his wayward sons and daughters through the work of his perfect Son.

There is a dimension of EXPRESSION in worship. We who have received God's grace in Christ yearn to praise God for his grace in Christ. Distinctively Christian expression pulses with Christ. "Let the *word of Christ* dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16).

There is an EVANGELISM dimension to worship. Baptizing and teaching – Word and Sacrament – are the heart of the Great Commission. They are precisely the things that we receive in worship. Lutheran worship is just as much a fulfilling of the Great Commission as presenting the "great exchange" at a prospect's kitchen table.

Finally, there is an EDUCATIONAL dimension in worship. The Word is taught through lessons and creeds, sermon and song. These worship treasures are imparted through learning's mother: repetition.

Confessional Lutherans appreciate each of these dimensions in worship. We strive to remain in the biblical center, keeping them in balance. *Purpose-driven problems begin when any one of these dimensions of worship replace GOSPEL PROCLAMATION as the central purpose of worship.* Consider the following.

If worship is all about an *encounter* with the transcendent God, we have just purchased a plane ticket to Constantinople and Eastern Orthodoxy. If worship is all about our personal *expression*, we have

purchased a bus ticket to Azusa Street, Los Angeles, the birthplace of modern Pentecostalism. If worship is all about *evangelism*, we are driving in our BMW towards the megachurch model, large churches with names that often end in –creek or –back. If worship is all about *education*, we are flirting with the Reformed or the rationalists.

There is little danger of WELS taking a hard right towards Eastern Orthodoxy, and, unlike some of the Reformed, we certainly understand that worship is more than mere instruction. Could it be, however, that we are tempted at times to overplay the cards of *evangelism* and *expression* in worship? These two are in the very air we breathe as American Christians.

Two quotes illustrate the point:

- "They need to understand the contagious nature of worship and the critical role it plays in missional renewal of the church. There is hardly anything more evangelistically powerful than a group of worshipping believers."<sup>3</sup>
- "People generally find it easier to decide for Christ when there are multiple relationships supporting that decision... For this reason, the larger your seeker service grows, the greater an evangelistic tool it will become."<sup>4</sup>

It goes without saying that a packed parking lot can lead to some curiosity about what's going on inside. This could lead to an opportunity for a curious non-Christian to hear the Gospel in the future. (In the interest of clarity, it is common in our circles to label this as pre-evangelism.) But one needs to be careful about unintentionally and unconsciously crossing a confessional line in our hearts! Worship demographics, statistics, style, and ambiance really don't help the Spirit's working – not even in the least. In true evangelism, we are instruments of the Gospel. Nothing more. Nothing less.

The Gospel proclamation in Lutheran worship is the same Gospel that the unbeliever needs for conversion and the saint needs for sustenance. Prof. David Valleskey's contention is apropos: the best worship for the seeker is also worship that is best for the saints.<sup>5</sup> In a word: if the unbeliever sets the objectives and agenda for public worship, what eventually happens to the worship of the saints? Congregations are wise to consider what the real issue is. Do they need a seeker service? Or do they want the seeker service because their members aren't actively seeking and loving the lost on a daily basis?

As for the tendency to stress personal *expression* in worship, it is common to read that worship is *awe*, *abandonment*, and *intimacy* with God. (David's dance before the Ark of the Covenant is a favorite passage to quote in this regard.) Some of these alternate purposes for worship have appeared in WELS contexts. It is true: these emotions do happen in worship. ("O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder..." CW 256:1.) These human emotions, however, are not the *purpose* of worship. They spring from the heart of worship: the Gospel. If we want more abandonment in worship, we don't need more dancing. We need more Jesus! ("Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all" CW 125:4.) Could it be that the omnipresence of "dancing David" references in current worship conversations flows from the

Evangelical/Pentecostal air we breathe in America? Lutheran interpreters will carefully balance David's dance (1 Chronicles 15) with David's decency and order (1 Chronicles 6:31 ff.), Solomon's dedication of the temple (2 Chronicles 5:2-6:42), Hezekiah's purification of the temple (2 Chronicles 29), and Josiah's celebration of the Passover (2 Chronicles 35:1-19).

Throughout the Church's history, it has been difficult to find the middle road between the cerebral and the emotional. In the quest for orthodox doctrine, it is easy to forget the emotional component of God's human creatures. In the quest for more expressive worship, it becomes easy to downplay the need for correct teaching. Here the law of love must rule! If worship is my primary opportunity to express myself emotionally, then prepare for an eventual journey into Pentecostalism. But if worship is my primary opportunity to receive the riches of Christ and to proclaim the Gospel to my neighbor, then I must rid myself of self-interest and look to my neighbor's interest. Saint Paul says it best: "You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified" (1 Corinthians 14:17). Preach the boundless riches of Christ! Emotions will follow!

### Why the Fuss over Purpose?

Why the sudden shift in worship's purpose in the last few decades? Marva Dawn gives three probable answers: "One, is the panic about declining numbers.... Another is the intensifying passivity of our cultural milieu, which causes some Christians to want to be entertained, rather than to do the work of worship. A third is related, for worship services are turned into a congregation's primary evangelistic tool because *the people* are not engaged in the practice of witnessing to their neighbors or in the difficulties of loving them."<sup>6</sup>

Satan knows that if he can confuse the purpose of worship, he has a good chance of obscuring the Gospel in worship. And then Satan wins. He wins by taking the focus off of Christ and placing it on man's reaction to Christ. He wins by driving a devilish wedge between the Great Commission's "go" and the very thing that we are to *go with*. May we – all together – tell the devil to take his

worship wedge and go play elsewhere! Instead of a purpose-driven church, or a mission-minded church, or a high/low church, let us strive to be a Christ-centered church. Everything else flows from there!

We gather in worship for a very specific purpose: to receive the riches of Christ. That is confessional Lutheran "function." We will discuss Lutheran "form" in future issues.

### Putting It into Practice

Spend some time this summer doing an "exegesis" of the orders of service in *Christian Worship*. How do their texts promote a confessional understanding of worship as receiving gospel blessings from Christ?

Read a good book on worship. *Christian Worship: Manual* (NPH), Timothy Maschke's *Gathered Guests* (CPH) or Marva Dawn's *How Shall We Worship?* (Tyndale) are all good candidates.

How do you think music, architecture, ambiance, and people's attitudes might change if the purpose of worship shifts from *receiving the riches of Christ* to *encounter, expression, evangelism, or education*?

Finally, if you are considering some changes to your parish's worship life, make certain you are clear on the difference between the different dimensions of worship and the central purpose of worship. Does that understanding influence any of the changes you propose?

### REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, IV, 60. Kolb-Wengert edition, p. 130.
- <sup>2</sup> Maschke, Timothy H. *Gathered Guests: A Guide to Worship in the Lutheran Church*. CPH, 2003. p. 20.
- <sup>3</sup> McNeal, Reggie. *The Present Future*. Jossey-Bass, 2003. p. 81.
- <sup>4</sup> Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Church*. Zondervan, 1995. p. 246.
- <sup>5</sup> Valleskey, David. *We Believe—Therefore We Speak*. NPH, 1995. p. 187ff.
- <sup>6</sup> Dawn, Marva. *How Shall We Worship?* Tyndale, 2003. p.39.



# CWS Ideas and Instruments: June and July 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 is available. 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 (\*).

**June 7: Holy Trinity.** Not every parish has the energy to plan special music the week after the Festival of Pentecost. But here are some easy ideas to consider.

Some of the CWS psalms appointed for festivals have refrains that are less generic than those in CW. So the refrain for Psalm 150 in CWS states three times “Holy is God the Lord of hosts” – echoing the triple acclamation of Isaiah 6 (Year B’s first lesson) and Revelation 4.

The revised *Planning Christian Worship* (available online) suggests six CWS hymns for Trinity Sunday. 724 “Voices Raised to You We Offer.” Two stanzas end “Triune God to you we sing.” Since the tune is new, a soloist or small choir sings stanzas 1, 2, 4. All sing 3 and 5. Consider using the organ/keyboard transposer function to lower the key a half step, making a new tune a little easier to sing. The Accompaniment Edition CD provides a descant in PDF format. Adjust any keyboard transposition if the descant is used. If a descanting instrument is used, it may also play the refrain of Psalm 150 (miked, or an octave higher, depending on the instrument) as well as sometimes doubling the melody of another hymn in the service.

**June 14:** handbell part for 771\* “I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light.” The Accompaniment Edition notes (available online and in the organist’s copy) state: “This accompaniment may be used alone to accompany the congregation, or it could be used in addition to the keyboard accompaniment.”

**June 21:** 754\* “The Tree of Life.” Since the tune is new, a soloist sings some or all stanzas. Note how this hymn complements the first lesson, Genesis 3:8-15. It may replace the psalm. The Accompaniment Edition CD provides a descant.

**June 28:** 756 “We Walk by Faith and Not by Sight” complements the second lesson, 2 Corinthians 5:1-10; cf. verse 7. It’s also a meaningful commentary on the supplemental second lesson, Colossians 1:3-8. Note how thoughts in the hymn can provide imagery or application for the sermon. Melody parts are available for C and B-flat instruments. Consider playing the hymn as final preservice music with keyboard and solo instrument. Use the solo instrument elsewhere in the service.

**July 5:** 785\* “O Lord of Nations.” If the service gives attention to Independence Day, consider this excellent hymn. Be sure to read the commentary from the Accompaniment Edition notes (online or in the organist’s copy) concerning the origin of the text after the 9-11 terrorist attacks. These comments may be included in the worship folder. Melody and descant parts are available for C and B-flat instruments.

**July 19:** 762 “Consider How the Birds Above.” We have confidence that God provides for us whether suffering a thorn in the flesh (second lesson), persecution (supplemental second lesson), or fear and rejection (first lesson; note the longer option in the supplemental lectionary). Select stanzas of the hymn may serve as responses to lessons and sermon. Descant parts are available for C and B-flat instruments.

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

## CWS Concertatos

The C/W commissioned four new arrangements of CWS hymns for choir, soloist, congregation, and instruments. By mid May these will be available from NPH. Free recordings may be downloaded from [wels.net/jump/cwsupplement](http://wels.net/jump/cwsupplement); three of these are also found on the CWS hymn sampler double CD.

- “Christ Has Arisen, Alleluia” - Tanzanian melody
- “Christ Jesus Lay in Death’s Strong Bands” - new melody
- “Father, God of Grace, You Knew Us” - Paul Eickmann text
- “For Builders Bold Whose Vision Pure” - Irish melody

## Worship and Evangelism

“Lutheran liturgical worship, because it is full of the gospel, offers what people need, not just to grow as Christians but to become Christians. . . . Such [worship], with the gospel at its center, will benefit both Christian and non-Christian, member and non-member, mature believer and recent convert. It is entirely proper, therefore, to conclude that Lutheran liturgical worship can serve as a valuable part of a congregation’s program of outreach.”

David Valleskey, *We Believe—Therefore We Speak*. NPH, 1995. p. 187, 191. See also Daniel Leyrer, “The Lutheran Liturgy and Evangelism” in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 106.1 (Winter 2009).



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2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398  
Phone: 414/256-3265 FAX: 414/256-3899  
<[www.wels.net/worship](http://www.wels.net/worship)>

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