

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost - Year C

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Second Sunday of Preaching Series on Worship

Special Service Book and Hymnal Service

Deuteronomy 30:9-14

Psalms 25:1-10

Colossians 1:1-14

Luke 10:25-37

07/14/2019

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

25Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 26He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" 27He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." 28And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

29But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. 31Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on

the other side. 33But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 34He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' 36Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" 37He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Worship, A History

Good morning! During the late 1800's the temperance movement spread from east to west across the United States of America, eventually arriving in Wheeling, WV, a rather industrial town whose steel and coal helped to build America. It has been said that steel from mills in that area was taken by train to the East Coast where it went north to help build the Empire State building. Wheeling had a large German population, and in St. James Lutheran church in downtown a group of Lutherans were meeting in the basement doing something extreme and insane... they were worshipping in English. Now, as scandalous as this was, they might have gotten away with this non-German worship service were it not for one thing... that little temperance movement got picked up by these English-speaking German heretics. This didn't sit well with the large amount of German brewers worshipping upstairs and so the group got the boot.

Christian groups, never being ones to take slights easily, moved barely a block away and started First English Lutheran Church. The times changed and both churches eventually worshipped in English, and the whole temperance movement thankfully died down in the Lutheran Church. And so it was that I grew up as a member of First English knowing of the old disagreements between St. James and First English that never seemed to be forgotten or put aside.

This is, in some ways, the story of Christian worship. It's a story of disagreement, of fighting, and of strongly held beliefs about what should happen. But beneath it all was the strong conviction that we NEED to worship, that something within the very fabric of our soul longs to cry out and sing to the God of all creation.

I struggled with where to even start for a sermon about the history of worship. Christian worship has its roots in Jewish worship, so should I start there? And if we talk about that, then we need to talk about the other pagan religious patterns, but maybe we should start with the very FIRST ways that people worshipped. But then I realized we would be looking at a 60 minute sermon and figured I needed to try and boil it down to the basics. So here's the history of Christian worship in roughly 900 words.

You really can't talk about Christian worship without mentioning the deep roots that it has in Jewish ritual patterns. As I mentioned in last week's sermon, the Psalms are the very first hymns of the church. But as the distinction between Jews and Christians continued to grow in the first century, Christian worship began to take on some of its own distinct elements. Where every other major religion or group worshiped publicly, Christians gathered together in private meetings in members' homes. (If you

ever felt nervous about inviting the pastor over for dinner, just imagine having the whole congregation over!)

When we look at scripture we can find two wonderful examples of texts that were clearly an important part of the belief system of the early church and which became central parts of worship. The first is in I Corinthians 15:3-7, our oldest and most basic confession of faith. If anyone is interested in following along it's on page 135 in the New Testament of your pew bibles. Paul writes:

“For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, ⁴and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.” (NRSV)

It's a statement of belief, one might even call it a creed, a profession of someone's faith. It summarizes the Christian faith in a basic way. The second passage is also something that we have from a letter of the Apostle Paul but like the Corinthians' text, is clearly something that precedes the writer. In the New Testament book of Philippians we call the Christ hymn. On page 152 of your pew Bible, Philippians 2:6-11, we find what is probably the oldest Christian hymn:

*6who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,*

*7but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
8he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death —
even death on a cross.
9Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
10so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. (NRSV)*

Even in these early stages of the Christian church the worship pattern was the same as today. Last week we looked at pages 92-93 of the *Evangelical Lutheran Book of Worship*, the red hymnal in the your pew, and saw that we follow the pattern of gather, word, meal, and sending. It was much the same for the early church when they met in the homes of fellow Christians. They would gather together, greeting one another and giving praise. Then they would sit and listen to scripture, listening to letters from people like the Apostle Paul as they circled throughout the area. Next they would have a meal,

celebrating the Eucharist in what would look like a regular meal to our eyes. Finally they would pray and leave, being sent out for the mission that God had called them to do.

It wasn't until a few hundred years later when Christianity became officially recognized by the empire that it became more institutionalized. During the fourth century we see some of the more common practices being developed. It was at this time that more formalized patterns began to be developed. We also see the creation of worship patterns for different times throughout the day. Services like Compline, Vespers, and Matins begin here.

Flying through hundreds of years of information, we move to the Middle Ages. From about the year 600 through 1500 we saw hundreds of changes and evolutions of worship in the Christian church. What was still central to the worship experience was the centrality of scripture and the sharing of the eucharist. What became a larger and larger problem was the illiteracy of the laity and the differences in language. Mass was spoken in Latin, but the average Joe and Jane didn't understand. They relied on the preaching and the stained glass windows to help them understand the biblical stories.

In the year 1517 a German monk started causing some trouble that changed worship forever. Martin Luther advocated for translations of the Mass and the Bible into the common language spoken by everyone. This made scripture and worship accessible in ways that hadn't been seen for hundreds of years. Ironically, it was these same Swedes, Germans, and Finnish who came across to the Americas and raised such a fuss when Lutherans tried to switch to English during worship services.

Worship in the United States in the early days was a little like the Wild West. Lutheranism especially saw a variety of different church expressions. A pastor at Power

in the Spirit this past week described ecumenism at this time as which group of other Lutherans could one talk to without condemning one's soul to eternal damnation. Hymnals and Bibles were still printed in the mother tongue up until the early 1900's. The first English Lutheran hymnal I know of was the Common Service Book with Hymnal that was published in 1917. I don't know for certain, but if I had to guess, the first World War played a major part in distancing American Lutheranism from German Lutherans. It was at this time that many Lutherans experienced some persecution because of our German roots. In fact, I've been told that it wasn't until the World Wars that we saw the American flag show up in sanctuaries, an appeal of sorts to show the rest of the country that we weren't German spies. As you can see in the service today, the specific parts of worship haven't changed much since the Service Book and Hymnal, just the order in which we get to them. What does the future of worship look like? I'm not sure. What makes me hopeful is the effort that is being put into making worship more inclusive. Things like gender-neutral language, and new emphases on making sure that people can show up in a church and follow along without needing to be an "insider," are growing trends. I also think we'll see more and more effort put into making the physical worship space accessible to all. St. Paul's is unique in that those who have physical disabilities can access every part of the congregational building. This isn't true with a lot of the older more traditional buildings. Other than that, I don't really know, but I can tell you this: the Holy Spirit will continue to lead us and gather us together for praise, scripture and a holy meal. It seems that the more things change, the more they stay the same. The Peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. AMEN