

Worship — Weeks 5–6: Structure, Liturgy and Meaning

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Review

- NT Worship: Discursive (psalms, hymns, songs, scripture, prayer, tongues/prophecy) combined with performative
- “Offerings” in the New Testament were often collected in preparation for the Eucharist; they shared a meal, and provided for the poor and the apostles.
- The Lord’s Supper combines imagery of Passover and the Day of Atonement.

Three practical ideas

- Movement
 - Drama – Our worship services should reenact the story of redemption, or a piece of it!
 - Approach – We approach God’s presence, he meets us there, we enjoy him (and he us), and then we go out of his presence into our common lives (to bear his image).
- Balance
 - In content
 - All kinds of Scripture
 - Different kinds of songs
 - Balance of hearing from God and speaking to God (praying/reciting Scripture is both!)
 - In form
 - Words vs. actions
 - Leaders vs. congregations
 - Ideal vs. practical
- Presentation
 - The medium is the message!
 - Movement, involvement
 - Balance between words (discursive) and actions/postures (presentative)
 - etc.

The Medium Is the Message!

- Structure reflects meaning
 - How much of the Law of Moses is about the structure of worship? A lot! How much of the New Testament? Not as much, but still some key passages. (NT is not “prescriptive” as much about these matters.)
 - Example: Priestly garments (Exod 28:9–12)
 - Example: Eating the Lord’s Supper together
- Structure contributes to meaning
 - Example: Posture when praying, singing, etc.
 - Example: ways of taking the Lord’s Supper reflect and shape belief
 - Example: Song choices restricted by medium

Some Structural Choices

- Service location
 - A building with pews and stained glass
 - Dedicated church building, modern, flexible
 - A public building, like a school or community center
 - Outside
- Arrangement of the sanctuary
 - Stained-glass windows
 - Pews with kneeling benches
 - Individual chairs
 - Elevated stage
 - Fan-shaped seating
 - Cross-shaped seating
 - All-face-forward seating
 - Floor seating; cushions or no
- Focal point of the sanctuary
 - Stage
 - Pulpit
 - Table/Eucharistic altar
 - Bible (open, closed)

- Musicians
 - Musicians up front
 - Musicians in the back
 - No musicians; a cappella only
- Preacher
 - In a pulpit
 - Lectern only
 - In front
 - Off to the side
- Preacher's clothing
 - Robe
 - Clerical collar
 - Suit/Jacket
 - Casual
- Biblical text and the congregation
 - Only hearing in foreign language (no written text for congregants)
 - Only hearing in native language (no written text for congregants)
 - Reading along with book-form Bible for each congregant
 - Reading along with biblical text on large screen
 - Reading along with biblical text on personal electronic device
 - Reading along, scripture passage printed in bulletin
- Eucharist (Lord's Supper)
 - Celebrated occasionally
 - Celebrated weekly
 - Elements distributed by clergy at front
 - Elements distributed by clergy and laity at front
 - Individual cups distributed
 - Drink from common cup
 - Non-alcoholic juice, not wine
 - Individual cracker/wafer
 - Pieces torn/broken from single loaf
 - Intinction (dipping the bread in the wine/juice)
 - Distributed by elders to congregation in pews
 - Distributed by anyone to congregation in pews
 - Individuals file to table, serve themselves
 - Eat/drink individually
 - Eat/drink in unison

Liturgical Elements

- Song choices
 - Movement: Entering God's presence; highlighting God's attributes; confessing sin; highlighting God's work in Jesus; preparing for the sermon; responding in faith
 - Other types of song: Lament, [call to repentance](#)
 - Trinity: Do we mention the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit? (not necessarily all at once, but over the course of our service?)
 - Songs about God vs. songs to God vs. songs exhorting one other
 - Historic songs vs. new songs
 - Sing a new song! Pss 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1. Psalm 150: mostly about the instruments!
 - Psalms or other passages that reuse and adapt older psalms: Pss 29; 96; 1 Chr 16.
 - Songs of the heart and songs of the mind
 - Songs of remembrance: e.g. Pss 89; 105; 106; 136
 - Songs celebrating God's attributes: e.g. Ps 34
 - Who decides which songs? Leader, preacher. Who decides if a song is appropriate? If we use a hymnal, a committee chose and arranged these songs. If we use a screen, we can add anything. Strengths, and weaknesses.
- Other aspects of Music
 - Content
 - Style
 - Instruments and volume
- Call to worship
- Passing the peace
- Scripture readings
 - From a common lectionary? OT and NT, Psalms, Gospels, Epistles. (Some weaknesses in the Revised Common Lectionary: Callahan 2013)

- Where do we read, and which languages? From a Bible, a paper, a small screen, a big screen?
- Confession of sin – Maybe a lament could be sung here, and then assurance of pardon
- Ecumenical Creeds — Fellowship with one another, and with the church throughout history!
- Sermon — The “prophetic” voice of God: Telling us what God has said and done, and how we should respond.
- Lord’s Prayer; Prayers of the People
 - Do our prayers have “movement”? (Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, 99–102)
 - Awe/invocation/adoration/thanksgiving – opening sequence
 - Confession/repentance/supplication/affirmation of faith/witness – central sequence
 - Grateful responsiveness/dedication/oblation/commitment to the Christian life – concluding sequence
 - Do our prayers reflect the Trinity? What would we pray specifically to the Father? To the Son? To the Spirit?
 - Prayer to the Father may emphasize: Omniscience, power, adoration, the Creator, thanksgiving, goodness
 - Prayer to the Son may emphasize: Our sin, need for a Savior, the incarnation of Jesus the Word of God, the gospel, the Good Shepherd, perfect life/death/resurrection, his intercession for us at the right hand of the Father, perfect example of human life
 - Prayer to the Holy Spirit may emphasize: Our regeneration, sanctification,

indwelling in our hearts (not Jesus in our hearts, BTW!), empowering us to understand/love, transforming us more into Christ’s image

- Offerings
 - Practical purpose: support the work of the church
 - Spiritual purpose: Acknowledge that all we have comes from God; The work of our hands is going to be used by God (immediately in the Eucharist, subsequently in the work of the church)
- Celebration of the Lord’s Supper
 - Oblation
 - Thanksgiving
 - Breaking of bread
 - Distribution
- Benediction
- Other ritual acts (sacraments? ordinances?): Baptism; kneeling, foot-washing, anointing with oil, laying-on of hands

Preparation for the Drama

- Rehearsal
- Sermon preparation
- Prayer
- Preparing what to say before and after songs
- Removing distractions
 - Screen
 - Musical excellence, planning
- Recognizing the work of the Holy Spirit throughout the process

Conclusions

- Remember who God is
- Remember who we are: Individuals made in God’s image; Local community; Universal church
- Be thoughtful, and listen
- Keep worshiping!