

The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 19-20, 2009
Instructions for Worship

Note

These instructions are given in lieu of a sermon for worship in order to deepen the understanding and appreciation of the people of God for the order of service. They are structured around the four principal elements of Lutheran worship: Gather – Word – Meal – Send.

Gathering

As individual believers we come together as one community of faith to worship the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This coming together is the first of four principal elements of Lutheran worship: the Gathering. Our worship begins not with us, but with God and how God has made himself known in his written Word, the Scriptures, and in the living Word, Jesus Christ, the Word-made-flesh. Our worship is both sacramental – God coming to us in Word and Sacrament; our worship is also sacrificial – our coming to God in response to his coming to us. We do this through our songs and hymns, our prayers and offerings. Lutheran worship is liturgical, following a common order of service that is very Biblical with strong roots in both Old and New Testament patterns. Many parts of the service are taken directly from the Scriptures. Lay persons, as well as clergy, participate actively in leadership roles in the service. The arts – both musical and visual – are employed in worship as gifts from God to be used for his glory and for the building up of God’s people in faith. The Gathering begins as we prepare ourselves to come into the presence of the Lord. We never worship alone, so greeting and welcoming one another as we gather is a good thing. However, we must not forget that we are coming into the Lord’s house and into his holy presence. It is a very commendable practice to arrive early for worship, enter the sanctuary, and kneel (or sit) for silent prayer before the service begins. The “Prayer Before Worship” in the bulletin may be a helpful guide so that an atmosphere of quiet but joyful expectation permeates our gathering. Pre-service music does not simply set the tone or mood for worship, but it is an offering for God’s glory. An opening word of welcome is provided and brief announcements are made. As we gather together, we recognize the holiness of God and our own unworthiness as sinful human beings. A brief order of Confession and Forgiveness prepares us so that with “clean hands and a pure heart” (Psalm 24) we may receive God’s gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. We remember our Baptism by invoking the Name of the Triune God, perhaps by making the sign of the cross first given us in Holy Baptism. We confess our sin, asking for God’s pardon and peace, and are then assured that through the cleansing blood of Jesus our sins have been forgiven. Thus forgiven, we stand and join in singing the Gathering (or Entrance/Processional) Hymn. Following this, the presiding minister greets the gathered assembly in words used by the apostles to early believers (2 Cor. 13:14). [The greeting moves into the Kyrie, where we petition our King: “Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.” The Hymn of Praise follows, which expresses our joy and echoes the song of the angels at the birth of Jesus: “Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to men” (Luke 2:14). The Hymn of Praise sings the praise of the Holy Trinity, and leads into the Prayer of the Day.] This brief prayer, sometimes called the “Collect,” collects and draws together the central theme of worship for the day. A greeting and response comes before it as pastor and people ask the Lord’s presence upon each other. We make this prayer our own by responding “Amen,” that is, “Let it be so.”

Word – Part 1

The second element in our worship may simply be called “Word” because it focuses on the Word of God. That Word is powerful, as Scripture tells us: “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). That Word is both Law and Gospel, convicting us of our sin and disobedience and raising us up to new life. The reading of Holy Scripture has always been a major element in Christian worship. Three Scripture lessons are usually read at each service. The First

Lesson is usually a selection from the Old Testament. This is followed by a responsive reading or singing of a Psalm, one of the hymns of the Old Testament. The Second Lesson is usually a portion of one of the New Testament epistles or letters to the churches. It is followed by the Alleluia and Verse, often an excerpt from either Old or New Testament. The climax of the readings is the Gospel lesson, a portion of one of those books that records the words and deeds of Jesus. We stand to hear the Gospel in honor of Christ who is among us in his Word. An acclamation of praise to Christ precedes and follows it. Along with other church bodies, Lutherans often follow a system of public reading of Scripture. Usually this is a 3-year cycle so that Matthew, Mark, and Luke's Gospel is associated with one year of the three-year cycle, with John's Gospel found among all three years.

Word – Part 2

The hearing of God's Word in the Scripture lessons is followed by the Sermon, which is a living witness of the Gospel, expounding the Word and applying it to our own times and conditions. The Sermon is crafted with the Holy Spirit's power and entered into by the preacher with much prayer, thought and study in order to bring the truth of God's Word into the daily life of the believer. Following the Sermon, the Hymn of the Day is sung, fitting the theme of the Scripture lessons and Sermon. There is a rich treasury of hymnody spanning many centuries that is both ancient and modern at our disposal. Many generations of believers have offered praise to God and witness to their faith through these hymns. We then profess the faith we share in the Creed, which embodies the Church's ancient and universal confession of faith in the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Lutheran worship makes use of what are called the three Ecumenical Creeds: the Apostles' (used at non-Communion services), the Nicene (used at Communion services), and the Athanasian (used on Holy Trinity Sunday). The Prayers follow the Creed – prayers of thanksgiving and intercession for the needs of the Church, the world, and all people according to their needs. These prayers vary from service to service according to needs and circumstances. The people of God respond to the petitions: "Hear us, O God." by saying "Your mercy is great."

Meal

In an upper room in Jerusalem Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples and so instituted the Lord's Supper with his commend, "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24). And so we begin the third element in our worship which may be called "Meal." Following the prayers we share the peace we have in Christ with one another. Christ's peace alone enables us to live in unity, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven us. The Offering of the people is gathered as the altar is made ready for the Lord's Supper. Offerings are given as an expression of love and gratitude for God's blessings. An anthem or special music may be sung by choir or congregation as the Offering is collected and brought forward. When the gifts and offerings have been brought to the altar, the Great Thanksgiving begins. Just as Jesus at table with his disciples offered thanks, so we embody in our celebration of the Lord's Supper a great prayer of thanksgiving. In the Preface, the Presiding Minister invites the people to lift up their hearts in thanks to God. Then a Proper Preface states the particular reason for thanksgiving appropriate to the day or season. This leads worshipers into the song that the heavenly hosts sang in Isaiah's vision (Isaiah 6:3) and the people of Jerusalem sang on that first Palm Sunday (Matt. 21:9): "Holy, holy, holy..." The Scriptural words which tell of Jesus' institution of the Sacrament are recited in order to consecrate the bread and wine. We pray that we may be rightly prepared and ready to receive our Lord as He comes to us in his Body and Blood in the holy Supper. The very words which Jesus taught us to pray – the Lord's Prayer – are then prayed, and a final exchange of the Lord's peace occurs before we gather around the altar to commune with our Lord and with one another. As the consecrated elements of bread and wine are given to us, thereby conveying to us Christ's true Body and true Blood, we sing a hymn, "Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), as we confess who it is we are receiving and a prayer for the blessings of forgiveness, life, and salvation which He promises to give in this Meal. Other hymns may also be sung. Personal prayers before communing and after are encouraged with such prayers found in the forepart of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (pages 47-48). "The Body of Christ given for you," "The Blood of Christ shed for you," are spoken as we receive the Sacrament, to which we may respond "Amen."

Following Communion, as the Lord's table is cleared, we sing a song of rejoicing from Scripture – the song of Simeon (Luke 2:29-32), in which Simeon rejoiced that he had seen Christ, a joy we share because we have received Him in the Sacrament. A final Prayer asks that we who have received the Body and Blood of Christ may now live as Christ's Body in the world.

Sending

If there is a Gathering of the people of Christ, there must also be a Sending as we go forth from Christ's table and the house of God to live as his redeemed people in the world. The final invitation to praise is pronounced: "Let us bless the Lord." And we respond, "Thanks be to God." And then the Benediction, the Blessing, is given from the Lord to his people. Although there are a number of Blessings, perhaps the most familiar and beloved is what is called the Aaronic Benediction, given by the Lord through Moses for Aaron and the priests to pronounce over the people: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace" (Numbers 6:24-26). And so we are sent back to the world which God so dearly loves with his blessing of peace to love and serve our neighbor in Jesus' name.

The Lutheran worship service points us consistently to the saving work and resurrection presence of Jesus Christ. In this service God speaks and gives to us; we respond with thanks and praise. And so we are linked together with the fellowship of all the saints throughout the ages until that great and final day when our earthly worship will give way to that full and complete worship in heaven. Amen.