

The Shape of Our Corporate Worship

As we prepare to gather to worship God corporately this Sunday I wanted to take the time to talk a little bit about the importance of how we order our worship services. The word liturgy may be a scary or unwelcome word for many of us as it is so often associated with a “high church” or ancient way of doing things. However, it is important to know that the word liturgy actually means “the work of the people.” Structure and repetition are important elements of liturgy. One theologian goes as far as to call many of the repetitive and structured (no matter how loosely) activities that the people in a particular culture engage in liturgy. One example he gives is the “liturgy of the shopping mall” with its certain atmosphere, advertisements and the similar behaviors that are present in most shopping malls. He points out how we are all engaged in liturgical activities that shape us every day of our lives and how we need countercultural liturgical forms to combat the worldliness of those types of cultural liturgies. He argues that we need worship services, which reenact the gospel week-after-week.

Christian Liturgy

Every church, no matter how informal or formal, has a liturgy. Even if a church gathers week-after-week and the only “structure” that exists is that first there is singing, then a prayer, then a message – this is still a liturgy. Understanding that every church has a liturgy and that the liturgy helps to shape us as people is important as we plan a worship service for a Christian church.

As a church we believe in the power of God’s Word, and more specifically the gospel, not only for salvation, but also for our continued sanctification. It is important that the gospel really shapes everything that we do. The gospel story gives us a framework of how to actually plan our worship services. This is something that has been recognized by the Body of Christ from the birth of Christianity. When we plan a service that is shaped by the gospel narrative we are not only hearing the gospel proclaimed through word, we are actually reenacting it in the very way we worship God together.

Gospel-Shaped Worship

So, you may be asking yourself what that looks like. Well, the good news is that we, as your pastors, already seek to do this every week that we gather. I think that the simplest way to look at it is this:

First, we begin our services with a Call to Worship, which reminds us that God has called us to worship him and he alone makes it possible through Jesus. We respond to this call with a song of Praise and/or Adoration, which reminds of God’s holiness and goodness. Just like in the countless times in Scripture when people are reminded of or confronted with God’s true

character, we are reminded of our sinfulness apart from Him. This leads us to a time of confession of sin and confession of our need for a Savior.

After a confession of our sin, we are quickly reminded of God's amazing grace in sending His Son, Jesus, to bear our sins on the cross, die and then be raised to new life so that we could be reconciled to Him. We respond to this by singing songs of thanksgiving and songs that remind us that one day we will see him face-to-face and worship Him eternally, uninhibited by any remaining sin. We also give sacrificially of our finances to show our need for complete dependence upon him and to further the work of his Kingdom.

All of this then leads us to the very important time where we hear the Word of God faithfully proclaimed to us through preaching. Historically, expository preaching has been the central point or climax of the Christian worship service. We are more prepared to hear from God's Word, which is "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart," (Heb. 10:12) when we have already been reminded of who God is and what He has done. From there we respond to God's Word by singing together once again. Finally, we are sent out or commissioned to go back into the world and proclaim the gospel as we live out our lives the rest of the week.

As you know, once a month, we also respond by celebrating Communion or the Lord's Supper as we remember together the price that Jesus paid on our behalf and proclaim that He will return again. Communion and Baptism are ordinances that have been instituted by God, which themselves both represent the gospel in their very form. They are also ways that we are reminded that our faith is not just spiritual, but includes all of our bodies – mental, spiritual, and physical.

Hopefully this helps you to see the importance of not only hearing the gospel proclaimed, but also the idea of reenacting it every time we gather as a church. We truly believe that the gospel shapes everything that we do as a church and this is an important way that we try to be intentional about that.

For Sunday:

Spend time in prayer, ideally with your family, asking God to prepare us to meet him again in the corporate gathering with our church family. Ask him to continue to elevate the importance of the church gathering in your heart and mind. If you are someone who "never misses a service" it is also a good idea to ask God to remind you that gathering with His body is not simply an act of empty ritual, but of life-changing worship and encounter with God, which is vital to our growth as His children. Read through Mark 5:20-43 and ask God to open your mind and your heart receive what He is saying through this passage and that He would use Pastor

Mark to clearly and faithfully proclaim it to us. You can view the order of worship [HERE](#) and pray through it and use it to help you prepare for the service.

We will also be singing a new song this Sunday called Not in Me. This is a beautiful song and prayer of confession and a reminder that our righteousness is found in Christ alone and not in our works or efforts. You can listen to the song and read the words [HERE](#).

See You Sunday!