

Walking the Liturgical Path

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Looking Through The Window

Introduction to Liturgical Worship

This article provides an explanation for the sort of worship we practice at Church of the Redeemer. The word that best describes the way we worship is “liturgical.” But what exactly is liturgy? At its best, liturgy is a participatory drama designed to bring us body, soul and spirit into *actual* worship of God and therefore into an *actual* transforming encounter with the living God.

Liturgical worship is a form of art – an art that brings reality to the soul and body as well as to the mind. To put it another way, liturgy is a window through which we see God. But if why we do what we do is left unexplained, not understood, liturgy becomes only a picture of a window rather than a window itself.

In real life we do not have pictures of windows hanging on the walls of our homes or churches. Windows are to be real openings people can look through, open & lean out of. Open windows give us the opportunity to actually smell fresh air and feel the wind on our faces. Good liturgy does the same thing. It is meant to actually open up the spiritual world to our minds, our hearts, and even our senses.

If that is really possible through liturgy (and our conviction here at Church of the Redeemer is that good liturgy will do exactly that) then we do well to understand and embrace the liturgy, to fully participate in it. To just “do it” is to be satisfied with picture windows and painted scenes behind them. And why should we settle for the single-dimensional when God can use liturgy to open up his dynamic presence and reality to us?

The beginning point of our consideration of liturgy is the question, why is worship such an important concern? To put it simply there is nothing more important than giving God the glory due his Name. Worshipping God is at the heart of loving God, which is the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:37). Worship will be the climactic center of our eternal existence with God and it is the most noble and exhilarating work of the people of God on earth. Worship is not measured by the feelings it produces but by the glory God receives from us as we worship (love) God with “all our heart, soul, mind and strength.”

Worship can be personal, the heartfelt welling up of adoration of God. It can also be corporate (a group of people worshipping together). Personal worship and corporate worship are both biblical and essential, and neither trumps the other as “better” or “more sincere.” Whether alone or within the group, worship is only as authentic and real as the faith and effort I bring to it.

Many churches practice forms of corporate worship in which the primary actors are on stage and the rest of the people are invited to join in by singing God’s praises & listening to a sermon. The burden is on the prompters to draw people to the throne of God, and they must “pull out all the stops” to create the atmosphere and invitation by which people will join in corporate worship.

At Church of the Redeemer, our worship is liturgical. Liturgy literally means “the work of the people”, and we “pull out all the stops” to create a path to God through the liturgy, which calls everyone to actively, personally and passionately do the work of worship, beginning to end.

If you are going to worship God personally and privately (and I hope we all do), you may be as spontaneous as you desire. You can sit quietly without moving a muscle or saying a word, you can lay prostrate on the ground, weeping before the cross, or you can dance with joy, whirling and shouting aloud. No markers or paths are needed for others to join you simply because no one else is joining you.

When we worship God together, however, and actually do the work of worship (not just watch others do it), there has to be a path we can follow together. Whatever your emotional reaction to the word “ritual”, that’s what we’re talking about – a planned and ordered path which all can understand and engage in together. A praise song or hymn is “ritualistic” in that it is carefully crafted to communicate messages and to allow us to all sing music and truth together. You could react and say, “I don’t want those words imposed on me”, but the intention is never to impose anything: it is to set us free to join our voices together and sing the truth about God and life. Imagine if we said, “Everybody, sing what you want to sing, whenever you want to sing it, in whatever key you want. It might be personal worship (with charitable stress on the word might) but it is surely not corporate worship. Corporate liturgical worship has ritual to it – planned words and actions that we do together, harmonizing ourselves in one voice to proclaim the glory of God.

Because this is worship, it is important; and because it is important, we add the element of ceremony. A ceremonial event includes certain actions and words that communicate the importance of the event and the messages of the event. Think of a wedding ceremony and the glorious moment when the music changes, everybody stands and the bride enters. There are dozens of messages being proclaimed without a single word being said – messages embedded within the ceremony itself. Ceremony embodies messages and by its very nature, it declares glory, majesty and sanctity!

Church of the Redeemer’s worship is thus corporate, liturgical, ritualistic and ceremonial. God calls us to worship: we respond together (corporate); we do the work of worship (liturgy); we follow a path that will enable us to actively worship on the same page with one another (ritual); we do so with the glory, joy and beauty appropriate to real worship of the Living God (ceremony).

The Summons to Worship

As a first step in that direction, let’s consider the beginning of our worship. We begin by submitting to the reality that the universe does not belong to us. It is God’s, and he is the one who calls us to worship him. This call to worship can take different forms. At Church of the Redeemer, the call to worship begins with a scriptural declaration. We responsively read a statement from the word of God that summons us to worship (i.e. “Blessed be God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And blessed be his Kingdom now and forever. Amen!”). Normally, being summoned to do anything feels strange: some person (or agency) in authority demands that we do something whether we like it or not. A summons is serious, and we do well to not ignore it.

When we stand and declare together this scriptural summons, we are acknowledging that this set apart time of worship exists because God demands it, and we are acknowledging that this demand is appropriate and right. As we read responsively the call to worship we are saying, “Whether or not I feel it or like it, I admit that it is God’s right, God’s due to call me to worship him.” So our worship begins with a powerful acknowledgement of the Sovereignty of God, believing that our life becomes ordered and sane only under that sovereign authority. Unless we orient ourselves to God as God then all of life is out of balance. Submitting to the summons with our words and our hearts is an act of faith and obedience.

Our call to worship is also collective: we do it together. In doing so we enact the reality that we are all created to be God-worshippers. Not one of us is to be a spectator. We cannot move the responsibility to worship to what “happens up front”. If it is not happening in our chair, in our individual hearts than we can only say we have been to a worship service: we ourselves have not worshipped. And in liturgical worship, we are not meant to go it alone. We are here together to do the work of worship.

But the congregation gathered and worshipping is not the total picture of the together part: we are actually combining our voices with the worship that continually fills the heavenly places. As we declare later during the Eucharist, there are angels and archangels who forever stand to declare the glory of God’s Name. Therefore, we are also joining our voices with the Christ followers who have gone before us. Our worship opens the window into another dimension, a mystical and mysterious place of worship that is eternal, heavenly and unending. For a few moments each Sunday, we sing along with an amazing and unending heavenly choir, and as we do heaven and earth unite for a moment of time!

To speak this way about worship, to acknowledge that it is not just an earthbound thing, is to say that our worship is sacramental: there is a mystery in it that we cannot fully, cognitively quantify. We are coming into the presence of God in a way that is different from our norm – even if it is only more conscious, more intentional and more collective than our daily worship. It is all that, but it is more: it is a time when we expect God to work in mysterious and true ways, joining heaven and earth, spirit, soul and body. The Call to Worship opens the door to enter into this awesome, sacramental time of giving God the glory due his Name!

Prayer of Approach: A Rich History

Following the Call to Worship we join our voices together in the following prayer:

“Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen”

This prayer has a very interesting history. Its traditional name is the “Collect for Purity.” As we pray this prayer, we pray ancient words. Though we can trace its roots in phrases used in worship as early as the 5th Century we can find this exact prayer in its Latin form in an 8th Century prayer book created by Alcuin of York, a Christian priest to the Holy Roman Emperor, Charlemagne. Over time, the “Collect for Purity” found its way into the Sarum Rite, which was the cycle of Christian worship for the Diocese of Salisbury in Southern England during Medieval times.

It is interesting that our first corporate prayer on Sunday mornings is an ancient one – one that has been prayed millions of times by our family of faith – but what’s really fascinating is its journey in liturgical function throughout history. Initially the “Collect for Purity” was a prayer allocated only for priestly use during a private, preparatory service prior to a public communion service. In its original form, it was not even available for the people gathered to worship. The prayer could only be prayed as an act of preparation by the priest who was presiding over the Eucharist.

When Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, compiled early and medieval church sources into the first Book of Common Prayer, he made a number of exquisite alterations, including his placement of the “Collect for Purity.” In the 1549 Book of Common Prayer the Collect was moved from being a private rite for the priest to a public prayer of honest approach and profound preparation at the very beginning of the Anglican Eucharistic Service. What a powerful shift, packed with meaning and significance! The need for purity in worship is not solely the duty of clergy or worship leaders: it is the obligation of all the followers of Christ gathered in worship!

The words of the prayer paint the picture of our reality with amazing detail. We live our lives exposed to God – “to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid”. We cannot hide. Therefore, we need his grace and mercy to cleanse us and empty us of impurities (“cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit”), so that we may assume a posture of active engagement in worship rather than one of passive observance or reception. Ultimately, as a worshipping community of Christians we lean on God to enable us to do the very thing that we have gathered to do, worship and love him (“that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy Name”).

Though it is God who enables us to worship, we have a responsibility to engage him humbly and personally. We are not an audience to a worship service. Instead, we ourselves (as individuals and as part of a community) are responsible for offering up a sacrifice of praise to the Lord of our salvation who is worthy of our praise. Clearly, this reflects the teaching of the New Testament and one that has been formational in the life of Church of the Redeemer - that is, the acknowledgment of the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9-10, “For you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”).

Since you can count on praying the “Prayer of Approach” at the beginning of our weekly worship service, let its story sink in, let the words come from your heart, and let its location in the service jar your memory. Recall how these words which were once designated for limited and extraordinary use have become the prayer of preparation and purity for all worshippers of Jesus Christ. Worship is not something done only by those who lead music, liturgy, sermon, or sacrament. We are all priests in the service of Christ, our great High Priest. The question before us as we say the Collect for purity is “Will I enter in to the worship of God?”

Procession

We have been summoned to worship. We have expressed to God the reality that he knows our hearts, that they need cleansing and refitting if we are to ever be able to worship him. Those things having been said, what do we do next as we follow the path that our liturgy lays down? In the Anglican liturgy, the next movement along that path is called the procession. At Redeemer, we are in the early days of our church plant and do not yet have a full procession. When we do have a procession- why?

Processions are a normal part of ceremonial events such as weddings, graduations and important convocations. Processions have a purpose. They communicate a message: an important, special event has now started. However, there is a major difference in the processions we are used to and the procession to begin Church of the Redeemer's worship. Most processions are a way to get the important people into the room in order to start the proceedings (e.g., now that the grandparents & parents, the bridesmaids and groomsmen are here, the wedding can begin). But the procession at Church of the Redeemer is not a time for the important people to get in place.

The understanding of the church from apostolic times has been that those in the procession act as representatives of the entire church. They are carried on the voices of the entire congregation singing the high praises of God. The processional is full ceremony, declaring physically and visually the glory and excitement of what we are all about to do. Everybody is coming to worship.

But that’s not all. Another essential message is communicated not verbally but symbolically when the representatives of the people come following the Cross. The only way that we are able to give God acceptable worship is through Christ’s death on the Cross. It is there alone that our sins are forgiven and that we are declared righteous before God.

Without that confidence we could never dare to be so bold as to march into the presence of God (either personally or through representatives). So we stand in Christ, in grace, cleansed by the blood of our Savior and Lord.

You will notice that some people bow as the Cross passes. They are not bowing to a piece of wood. They are acknowledging their reverence for what that piece of wood represents and declares. They are joining in the procession by using an action to express their heart. But whether or not we bow, each of us is to bring our full heart, soul, mind and strength to this corporate, liturgical, ceremonial time of worship.

Worship Through Music

Christians in all times and places have engaged in singing praises to God. Since Old Testament times it is clear that musical worship has played an important role in the worship of God. The Psalms themselves make it abundantly clear how integral music was to the proclamation of the Scriptures. The preface to Psalm 5 is "To the Choirmaster: For the Flutes;" Psalms 120 to 136 are "Songs of Ascent;" many other Psalms are simply "Songs of David."

In other places in Scripture we see the importance of singing in communal worship of God. In the New Testament, James 5:13 says, "Is there anyone who is cheerful? Let him sing praise." In Colossians 3:16 St. Paul encourages believers, saying, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." And in Revelation, St. John's vision of heaven is one of "Holy, Holy, Holy's," "Amen's" and "Alleluia's" being sung continuously to the Lord. The Apostle's vision illustrates how our own praise in song on Sunday's imitates, conjoins, and agrees with the eternal worship service in heaven around the throne of God.

In the Church during the first several centuries after Christ, worship through song was a normal and expected pattern of worship. The first three centuries A.D. were a particularly creative time in the early church for song writing. Moreover, we read from the writings of the early church fathers such as St. Augustine, St. Basil, and St. Irenaeus, how vital it was for Christians to join together in worship through singing praises. Sung worship was clearly seen as we see it today, an important means of blessing God for who he is, giving him due thanks and praise for his faithfulness, celebrating salvation, and teaching the story of redemption through Jesus Christ.

Historically, the Church's use of music matured and developed over many, many years of use and practice. Hymns were being written and circulated by the 2nd century. Some of the earliest liturgies were sung as chants – that is they were rhythmic and melodic recitations of prayers and blessings. Hymns continued to be written. For example, the ancient Irish hymn "Be Thou My Vision" that we sing at Church of the Redeemer is traced to at least the 8th Century. By the 9th century there were hymnals which were available to various communities. The Reformation of the 16th Century ushered in a watershed period for the use of music in the worship service. For example, the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, first produced in 1549, opened wide the gates of worship through congregational singing, particularly with the Psalter (the book of Psalms).

Over the years there have been many debates concerning the settings and style of music used in worship services. Psalms or hymns? Accompaniment or a cappella? Pipe organs or strings? Hymns or contemporary choruses? While divergent opinions abound, it is indisputable that communal worship of the living and vibrant God involves vibrant and meaning-filled singing.

Fast forward to this Sunday and what you will see at Church of the Redeemer. We utilize the treasure of classic Christian hymns that exist in our tradition and have been celebrated and cherished by the church for many generations. These songs are combined with some contemporary pieces which communicate not only sound doctrine but also deep intimacy with Christ. By drawing on ancient hymnody and contemporary pieces, the music in our worship is textured and dynamic, celebrating our tradition while embracing new authorship and creativity. Admittedly,

however, the songs chosen on any given Sunday are really only an apparatus, a means to help accomplish an end. Real worship through song happens in the hearts of each one of us as we praise our Lord when we sing.

One of the most fascinating aspects of worshipping God through song as a community is the way our singing borders on the sacramental. It is something we do in time, in a physical place that seems to open up to us the transcendent grace of God. Moreover, when we join together our voices, we do not sing our praises to the Triune God as an assorted lot of isolated, lonely individuals. Rather we do it as the Church unified as we praise through the power of the Holy Spirit. This unified praise even transcends geography. It is bigger than our specific locale in Chapel Hill and Durham . It transcends the boundaries of society as different cultures, different nations join in one voice. It transcends time, meaning our worship looks into the past and joins the praise of our forebears in faith. It looks to the future, because when we sing together for that brief time on Sundays we are doing something that we will be doing for eternity. This transcendent union of praise is singular in its focus to honor and glorify the One who loves us, the One who calls us, the One who forgives us, and the One who redeems us

As singing our praises is a way for us to respond to God as we should, it also prepares us to hear from God himself through the reading and preaching of his Holy Word. As we conclude our time of singing, the worship leader prays for all of us. Like the Prayer for Purity that follows the Summons to Worship, this prayer is also called a Collect (cah-lect). Collects do what the name suggests: they collect us and gather us together in a corporate prayer. They give us focus as a community and they prepare us to hear God speak.

God's Word to Us

If you come to Church of the Redeemer regularly, you will hear Scripture read & recited frequently in the service. As part of Anglican tradition and conviction, we believe that there is power in simply reading and hearing the unadorned Word of God. It is alive, sharp, like a two-edged sword that cuts to the heart of things (Hebrews 4:12). So we read the Bible a lot, reading in prayerful hopes that you (and all the rest of the people in the congregation) are actually fully engaged in listening. But at this point in our service, God's Word takes center stage. Having come to worship, having acknowledged that this is God's universe and we are here to honor him, having sung praises that bring him squarely before our eyes, having collected our thoughts in prayer before him – now we are ready to hear what he has to say.

Normally we read three passages – one each from the Old Testament, the New Testament Epistles and the Gospel. Sometimes at Church of the Redeemer, we follow the lectionary, a cycle of Scripture readings used throughout the world-wide Anglican Communion in weekly services. Other times we diverge from the lectionary and read specific texts that form the basis of what our current sermon series is covering.

The readings are followed by a sermon (sometimes called a message, other times a homily). From the beginning, Anglicans have been convinced that God has given spiritual gifts of wisdom, knowledge, preaching and teaching to certain people in his church. Because these are spiritual gifts, God works through the teaching (or preaching) of his Word supernaturally to bring about conviction, understanding and change. That is really the purpose of a sermon – to exhort, convict, comfort, instruct, or whatever similar words you may insert, with the goal of genuine spiritual transformation. Preaching in the power of God is not an informational event – it is a transformational encounter!

While the ministry of the Word in a Christ-centered church cannot be limited to the pulpit or to Sunday mornings, what happens there sets the tone for the rest of the ministry. If the Word is taught effectively and clearly, if people's hearts, souls, minds and wills are engaged, then the church is on the path of fulfilling the mission of the church, becoming and making disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). Jesus words are clear – "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

Although there are several other factors essential to spiritual growth and transformation, the Word of God is at the center of that process. The goal of instruction is “love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Timothy 1:7). In other words, the goal is a true relationship with God and transformed character and actions. But we cannot get there without the knowledge of God, his will and his ways, and that is available to us only through the Holy Scriptures, which we gladly read, teach and preach!

Reciting our Faith - Creeds and Prayers

After the reading and teaching of the Scriptures, the next step in the ancient path of Anglican worship is the weekly recitation of one of the great creeds of the Christian Church – normally the Nicene Creed or, occasionally, the Apostles’ Creed. We follow this tradition at Church of the Redeemer, but the question remains, other than tradition, why do we do it? What does it mean? Why is it important? And finally, if we are going to do this, how can we fully enter into the process so that it means something and helps us spiritually to worship God?

The historic Creeds were established in the first centuries of the life of the church, each in response to questions or controversies about fundamental beliefs of Christianity. They were, in effect, successful efforts to clarify and clearly state our essential, core beliefs as Christians and therefore to also state what is outside the box of biblical Christianity.

The Creeds were formed (forged would probably be more accurate) through “councils” where Christian leaders met, defined the issues being raised, examined the Scriptures, discussed the traditions and teachings that had been handed down to them from Jesus’ apostles, prayed and came to conclusions concerning the specific issues(s) being raised at that time in history. The results of the most significant of those deliberations are the four great Christian Creeds – the Apostles’, Nicene, Chalcedonian and Athanasian. The Nicene is generally considered the fullest overarching statement of essential Christian belief, with the Apostles’ being a smaller but effective statement of the same. The Chalcedonian and Athanasian Creeds are more focused answers to specific questions concerning Jesus Christ, the nature of the Trinity and the Holy Spirit. As a result the first two are most often used in Christian worship as overall declarations of the faith while the latter are used as “tests of orthodoxy” in determining the theological understanding of individuals, churches or movements. All of the Creeds are considered to be clarifying statements of what true Christians believed and taught from the beginning, not late innovations concerning the Christian faith.

Since the days of the early church, Christians have recited the Nicene and Apostles creeds during corporate worship to publicly affirm the faith. As we join them we remind ourselves of what we actually must believe if we are to be called Christians. For example, the Nicene Creed is a powerful document of Trinitarian belief and answers basic questions about the nature of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It reminds us of the work that each Person of the Trinity has done to rescue us from sin and death. Take the time to pull the Nicene Creed apart and consider it phrase by phrase. Every phrase reveals truths that by all rights should thrill us. What does it mean to declare that Jesus is “begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father”? Do we really “look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come”?

As we recite one of the creeds week by week, they continue to hold before us the faith that has been handed down from the fathers. In ways the creeds are like a road map. From an accurate map, we can determine the clearest, most direct way to get from one place to another. Then as we travel, we pull out the map to make on-the-spot decisions necessary to keep on the path, we can confirm our choices after we make them and we check our progress along the way. This is especially important whenever the path seems unclear.

The great Creeds serve in the same way. They lay out for us the path of faith, clarify the right choices required to keep

on the road and confirm our path after we have made our choices. They affirm to us (and to any seekers who may be there) what we actually believe and therefore where we are headed in the journey of faith.

Over the centuries, the Creeds have shown up in many different spots in the worship liturgy, each for its own good reason. In some traditions and services the recitation of one of the Creeds is found near the beginning of the service in order to state, early on, the fundamentals of the faith. In many other traditions it is part of the Eucharistic service as a reminder of the truths at the core of the Gospel. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Anglicans began to place it immediately after the sermon, as part of the overall proclamation of the Word. Having read the lessons and having listened to the sermon, the declaration of truth continued with the Creed. In addition, it's no secret that the shapers of Anglican liturgy desired to make sure that, no matter how bad or dull a sermon might be, the congregants always had the opportunity to hear and declare solid truth about God! In reality there is no consistent practice about where the Creed must be spoken.

At Church of the Redeemer, the Creed normally follows the sermon. On the other hand, during a baptism, the Creed is woven into the baptismal liturgy. But wherever and whenever we stand together to declare our common faith, it is a blessing to "pull out the atlas and confirm that we really are on the right path" in our understanding and worship of the Triune God!

Form, Prayer, and Power

If you had to make a very practical list of what we do as Christians – not verbose treatises on theological or ecclesial activities, but a list of the ordinary, daily, "bread and butter" components that describe our lives of faith – you would have to place prayer at the top of the list.

It's true isn't it? Our relational connection with God is rooted and grounded in our daily prayer life. We pray to know God. We pray to be near to God. Without prayer, we lose our way. Without prayer, our faith loses the potency of living as children of God. Without prayer it is harder to cast off the trappings and accoutrements that compromise our ability to live as salt and light in a bland and dark world. Without prayer it is easy to forget who we are and whose we are. Tertullian, the brilliant theologian from Carthage, saw prayer, not his intellectual grasp of Christianity, as central to his faith. He called prayer the "wall of faith." Prayer hems us in, preserves us and protects us in Christ.

Prayer has always been vital to the lives of believers. In Luke 11 we read that Jesus' disciples asked our Lord to teach them how to pray. Implicit in this request is two things. First, prayer is vital to following Jesus. Second, we don't innately know how to pray. Authenticity and sincerity are essential components of prayer, and our authenticity and mature grow as we really pray. C.S. Lewis expresses that truth when he said "Prayer doesn't change God, it changes me." How we pray and what we pray continues our conversion as we engage the living God. In other words, we pray what we believe and we believe what we pray.

If personal prayer is so vital to the spiritual life of Christians, it follows that prayer must be equally life giving and significant for the Church. The Christian cannot fulfill his or her spiritual obligations in solitude. We are called to be with one another on this journey. It is not unusual then that liturgical prayer (in the form of the Prayers of the People) plays an important role in our weekly worship of the Triune God. Historically, going back to the Temple in Jerusalem, the Psalms were corporate praises and prayers that worshippers used to engage God. Then as Christians began to worship together, they composed prayers for the church to be prayed by the people of God. From the time of the early church, through Medieval times and into the Reformation, the people of God have used those crafted prayers so that all believers might pray together in the worship service.

The Prayers of the People enable us to bring corporate conviction, form and order to our prayers. Like the scope of a rifle enables focus and enlargement of the target for a surer shot, our liturgical prayer collects us together to become more effective agents of intercession for our world. In some mysterious way, our prayers agree with the redeeming movement of the Holy Spirit.

As we pray the Prayers of the People we reach a point in the service where God's Word and our world converge in a deep way. That's why the prayers are located where they are in the service – after the Scripture readings, the sermon, and the confession of faith in the Creed. The Word of God has been spoken. We have responded in faith. It is therefore appropriate for us to approach God in prayer.

The Prayers of the People, as they are implemented at Church of the Redeemer Church, enlarge and enliven the scope of our Sunday morning worship beyond the walls of our church and outside the lives of those who are present. They broaden the horizon of our conversation with God, if you will.

Sometimes at Redeemer we have a short time of silent or extemporaneous prayer. Other Sundays we use a liturgical form of prayer that prays for several specific elements:

- The Church and its ministry and mission – our own church and the Church at large
- The nations of the world and all in authority in the world
- The welfare of the world
- The concerns of the local community
- Those who suffer and those in any trouble
- Praises to God for his faithfulness and goodness

We pray what we believe and we believe what we pray. God is concerned about all of these things, though at times it may seem otherwise. Our world is filled with darkness and is in need of divine intervention and change. As followers of Jesus Christ, we know that in his coming, things have indeed changed. When we pray, we agree with that change – also known as redemption – and look for his coming kingdom.

The Prayers of the People are a part of the service that is considered Proper, meaning the content and style of the prayers can change every week. There are several styles and types of prayers that are used, but in each case the prayers that are crafted for use on Sunday mornings are thoughtfully and prayerfully considered not only in their requests made of God but also in the faith in God that they communicate.

Regardless of the form of the prayers, you know they will be a part of your Sunday encounter. Come then to the Prayers of the People with a heart expectant to intercede and plead with God! Come to do the work of the church! Come with specific requests, names of people, parts of the city or world that are hurting! Come and pray trusting that by so doing the powers and principalities of darkness can be pushed back! Come knowing that your prayers matter and that they will be heard by God!

If we as followers of Jesus Christ fail to intercede for those in the world around us, who will pray for them?

Scrambling to His Feet - Confession

At the end of the Prayers of the People we come to a time when the truth we have heard and declared confronts our own personal experience. We have the opportunity to see ourselves as we really are and to see God as he really is and to respond accordingly. Bottom line: we have the opportunity to stop, confess our sins and seek our Lord's forgiveness.

Believe it or not, confession is a controversial issue among Christ's followers. Because Christ's death on the cross settled the debt of sin once-for-all, and full and complete forgiveness is applied to anyone who trusts Christ as Savior at the very moment of salvation, some people teach that there is no further need for confession of sin. "Why bother? It's all forgiven, and your confession actually hints at a lack of faith." On the other extreme are some who believe that every sin must be confessed or one's very salvation is in jeopardy.

For us, the public opportunity for personal confession is a matter of obeying the Scriptures. 1 John 1:5-10 tells us that we do sin and that we need to confess it. James 5:16 indicates that some sins (if not all) should be confessed to one another as part of the full healing process of the Christian life. Jesus tells his followers point-blank that we must interrupt our worship in order to be reconciled to one another, i.e., confess and be forgiven, if we remember that we have unresolved conflicts (Matthew 5:23-24). For his part, God certainly has never shied away from confronting his children about their sins directly and calling them to confession, repentance and renewal. Confrontation and confession was not just a private affair! St. Paul himself challenged his fellow apostle Peter over sinful, loveless behavior toward Gentile converts (Galatians 2:11-14). If the apostles can sin, be confronted, confess, repent and maintain their calling and ministry as apostles, then certainly we have no reason to fear facing our own sins.

Confessing is a profound spiritual moment. We are "agreeing with God concerning the reality of our actions or the state of our hearts." We are "looking at our actions or heart attitudes exactly like God looks at them." We are moving from our self-righteous defenses and excuses to the place where we say the same thing about ourselves that God says. THAT assessment of ourselves and our subsequent confession IS spiritual transformation!

But the process is only half done when we see ourselves for real. For in the face of our confession, God responds with forgiveness, cleansing and absolution. We are released! We are set free from the burden and debt of our actions. Not to be too graphic, but think about the loving ministrations of a mother changing the dirty diaper of her infant. Does that child's dirty diaper mean he is no longer a son? Of course not! Does the cleaning up process make him a son again? No – he is already fully the son, and he will always be the son. But that cleaning up process is love on the parent's end; it is for the blessing of the child. If it isn't done, things only get worse, not better. In the spiritual realm, that's what Jesus does when we confess. We come, stinky and incapable of cleaning up the mess, and he cleans us up with the power of his love and grace and the remembrance and application of the price of our freedom. There is no greater power for change than truly believing that God sees us naked, wholeheartedly loves us and removes our dirt. Confession and forgiveness are the place where this can come together in our souls, week after week, day after day.

The most visceral picture we have in Scripture of this process is John 13. At the end of the day, having walked in sandals the dusty, grimy unpaved streets of Jerusalem, the disciples entered the Upper Room with disgusting, smelly feet. Jesus dropped to his knees and took each filthy foot in his hands and washed it. Peter objected, "You'll never wash my feet." Jesus replied, "If I do not wash your feet, you have no part with me." The word "part" is the word *Koinonia* – "fellowship." He wasn't threatening to cut off Peter from salvation: he was saying that true fellowship with Christ requires daily cleansing from the dirt and grime we pick up on our journey through life. In other words, it requires the constant re-assessment of ourselves and our actions, saying the same things about them that God does. And it requires the renewal and deepening of our understanding and experience of God's infinite grace in light of who

we are and what we have done.

Our public confession is a powerful moment when, having been convicted by God through his Word of issues and lacks in our life, having reflected back on our week and its ups and downs, we acknowledge both “things that we have done and things that we have left undone”. The declaration of absolution which follows, accompanied by our corporate scriptural declarations of forgiveness, confirm what has happened between each of us and our Lord.

No wonder we can stand up at that moment and say to one another “The peace of Christ”. Not just a pleasant, quaint greeting – but a declaration of all that we believe and live by, a declaration of the renewed reality that, in Christ and his cleansing blood, we live and move and have our very being in a state of peace with God and with one another! Hallelujah!

By the way, it has been observed that we don’t get to choose who receives our peace, or who declares peace to us. We are asked to exchange Christ’s peace with whoever is standing near. It is a great reminder that God, not I, chooses who will receive the blessing of peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1)

The time of the service we call “The Peace” is also a time when we are given the opportunity, as we have been reconciled to God in Confession and Absolution, that we can be reconciled with one another. Jesus told his followers that if they come to make a sacrifice and realize there is discord in their relationships that they should go and make those relationships right before making their sacrifice. Before we approach the table of Communion where we remember Christ’s sacrifice for us to make reconcile us with God, it is proper for us that we make sure our relationships with each other are reconciled and right as well.

The Center of Our Worship: Eucharist

Church of the Redeemer is what is known as a “eucharistically centered church.” That simply means we are convinced that the climax of our worship together is the time when each of us comes in faith to the table of the Lord Jesus. In reality, everything else we have done in our service has followed a path designed to bring us to this place of personal, intimate fellowship with Christ.

In ways that are mysterious and wonderful beyond our comprehension, the grace and love of God is ministered to our souls in this moment. Every aspect of our life in Christ is renewed and refreshed when we come in faith, open neediness and worship to the table of the Lord.

The Eucharist service (usually called the Eucharistic prayer) often opens with “the comfortable words of the Lord” – direct scriptural declarations of promise and hope concerning the gospel. Following that is the Sursum Corda, literally the “lift up your hearts”. We affirm the mystery of the presence of the Lord among us at this moment and literally (by faith) “lift our hearts to the Lord”, bringing our whole selves (our troubles, struggles, sorrows, joys, hopes and love) to the Lord. Indeed, all that we have hoped and longed for is now present in this moment, and “it is right to give him thanks and praise.”

The next words of the liturgy declare God’s worthiness as the object of our worship – Creator, Redeemer, Savior and Lord. We sing the Sanctus (Latin for “holy”), joining our voices with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven who, seeing the face of God, can do nothing more than fall down in worship.

Following that we listen as the celebrant (i.e., the one leading the Eucharist celebration) recalls the simple, beautiful facts of the gospel. We sit or kneel during this time to show our reverence for what is being spoken. The specific words

vary among a number of different Eucharistic prayers, but the outline is always the same: God's creation and plan for man, man's sin and fall from grace, God's ongoing, relentless love and pursuit of man throughout Jewish history and his provision of Jesus as our Savior. At Church of the Redeemer we vary the words of the Eucharistic prayer according to the different seasons of the church year. If you listen carefully from season to season, or especially on the high and holy days of the church calendar, you will notice the variations of the words that tie the Eucharist to the spiritual themes of the season.

The recounting of the gospel climaxes with the reminder of the institution (i.e., the establishment) of the Lord's Supper in the upper room based on the words of Jesus and the apostle Paul. In recounting Christ's work and in taking this communion, we are, by word and deed, proclaiming the mystery of the faith, "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again." We are ready to receive the elements – almost! Before we do, however, the celebrant prays that the Holy Spirit will sanctify the bread and wine, showing them to "be the Body and Blood of our Savior, the new and unending food of eternal life." Then the celebrant prays that the Spirit will sanctify us, "that we may faithfully receive this Holy Sacrament." The Spirit's work in the elements and in the people joins his mysterious work with Spirit-given faith, for without faith the Sacrament is for naught.

What exactly happens with the elements at the Eucharist has been one of the greatest controversies in church history. Godly men and women have struggled to understand and explain it. Many Christians believe that it is just a time to remember and reflect on the work of Christ on the cross. To them it is primarily a teaching tool for understanding. Others believe that it is a time of remembering and also a time of intimate and personal encounter with Christ. For these, it is a powerful act of conscious worship, but only that. Others believe that in addition to both those aspects, God is truly present in this process in a way that is mysterious and powerful, and that the process offers actual spiritual healing and transformation for those who receive these elements in faith. Still others believe that the power of the sacrament is so great, and the transformation of the elements is so real that in merely receiving and ingesting them, the participant is given life.

The English Reformers rightly understood communion as a sacrament – a physical and symbolic act in which the Lord is actually present and active to bring us his grace and power in ways that we cannot fully quantify or understand. It is more than a memory tool, more than an act of conscious worship. Something happens that is beyond our mental comprehension, that has power and effectiveness to heal us and change us in the spiritual realm. However, these wise and godly leaders did not teach that the bread and wine literally, physically become Christ's body and blood but that they are his body and blood in the spiritual realm, through the sanctifying presence of the Spirit in the physical elements and in our faith. Following the English Reformers, therefore, we fall into the third group of people described above, and according to that conviction, we pray directly for God to send the Holy Spirit to set apart these elements as the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Savior. We also pray that God will send his Spirit upon us to set us apart and to engender faith in us, for apart from our active and personal faith, it would not be authentic or effective in any way for us to approach the table.

As a final preparation for the Eucharist, we join in the Lord's Prayer, and then declare that "Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us" once and for all on the Cross. At that point the table is open to all who believe and who are in right relationship with the Lord.

Receiving the Eucharist is a precious, mysterious spiritual event. It is also a sacred event, and St. Paul enjoins us to be sure that we do not receive the bread and cup in an unworthy manner (1 Corinthians 11:17-34). That means we should not come lightly or cavalierly but in true and sincere faith. We must not come if we are harboring known, unconfessed sin. We particularly should not come if we are in unresolved conflict with another Christian and have not

done everything we know to do to restore that relationship.

Our Eucharistic service is aided by musical worship. It is a time of intimacy, reflection and joy.

By the time we have finished, by all rights our hearts should be filled with thanksgiving, so we collect our prayers together in a final prayer of thanks and praise for the wonderful gift of Christ, renewed to us through the Eucharist service. We have been with the Lord!

Open Hands, Open Hearts & More

Sacramental worship understands the intimate connection between spirit, soul and body. Seemingly small gestures and actions can often declare significant truth. A number of such small gestures crowd around the process of celebrating the Eucharist. Nothing is unintentional or purposeless.

Water and Wine

During the Offertory, our Deacon prepares the table for the presbyter or celebrant to consecrate and serve the Eucharist. The word Eucharist comes from the Greek word ευχαριστία, meaning "thanksgiving." Eucharist as a term is used both to refer to the Communion ceremony itself as well as the elements of bread and wine.

As the table is prepared, the bread is uncovered and placed on patens (or plates). The wine is poured into the chalice (cup). Then water is mixed with the wine. This rite of pouring water into the wine is a great example of how even minutest details of Christian liturgy are packed with symbol, meaning, and tradition.

There are three traditions associated with the practice of conjoining the water with wine at the Lord's table. First, it was simply the custom of the Jews in the ancient near east to temper wine with water at their tables. Testimony from early church fathers understood from the Apostles that the Lord himself mixed water with wine at the Last Supper. Regardless of specific origin, it appears that this practice was a part of the early church's celebration of Communion (St. Justin Martyr mentions this practice in his Apology around the year 150).

While water mixed with wine was a domestic tradition in Jesus' culture, from a very early point in the worshipping life of the church, the mixing of water with wine took on profound symbolism. This brings us to the second tradition associated with water and wine. Around 210 A.D. (still very early in the Church's life), St. Cyprian wrote on the importance of using water and wine in an epistle to a Christian sect that used only water in their celebrations. These are his words:

"For because Christ bore us all, in that He also bore our sins, we see that by the water is understood the people but by the wine is showed the blood of Christ. But when the water is mingled in the cup with wine, the people [are] made one with Christ, and the assembly of believers is associated and conjoined with Him on whom it believes; which association and conjunction of water and wine is so mingled in the Lord's cup, that that mixture cannot any more be separated."

The union of water and wine is a living symbol of the eternal and inseparable union between Jesus and his followers. What a powerful image of intimacy!

The third tradition associated with this practice is connected to the passion of Christ as it was water and blood that proceeded from his side when it was pierced by the soldier as he hung dead on the cross (John 19:34). This is a visual image. Christ has died on the cross for us. It's a profound reminder of the great price of suffering that was paid on our behalf so we could participate in the coming sacrament of Holy Communion. To quote from the Eucharistic Oblation of

the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, “having in remembrance his blessed passion and precious death, his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension; we render unto thee most hearty thanks for the innumerable benefits procured unto us by the same.”

Nothing in our worship service is coincidental, unpurposeful, or empty of meaning. Though it takes only a few seconds to pour water into the wine, there is deep symbolism and rich tradition present in preparing the table for Holy Communion.

Coming to Receive

The table has been prepared; words have been spoken that bring us to the apex of the Eucharist, the gift of coming forward to receive. The hinge between these moments in the celebration of the Eucharist is the breaking of the uplifted communion bread and the words of invitation, “Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us, therefore, let us keep the feast.” The breaking of the bread is an obvious visual reminder of the broken body of Jesus on the cross. Holding up the bread and cup with the words, “these are the gifts of God for the people of God” reminds us visually that our lives are literally sustained by the person of Jesus Christ and the ongoing benefits of his sacrifice for us. But some of the most significant visual-images-of-spiritual-reality occur when worshippers come to the table to receive the Eucharist.

At Redeemer we follow the ancient tradition of the Church that all who are baptized believers in Christ are welcomed to the Communion Table. For those who are not yet baptized or not yet believers we encourage them to come forward and receive a prayer for blessing instead. Just come to the front and cross with your arms over your chest and we will know to pray for you instead of giving wine and bread. It is a very tender and humble posture, a request for protecting prayer and benediction.

Baptized children are welcome to receive Communion as well whenever their parents feel they are ready. We do not yet do any form of First Communion Class at Redeemer. If you would like for someone from the church to walk you through how to talk with your kids about Communion, just let us know and Pastor Dan or another of our leaders will be glad to get together with you.

Followers of Christ come, sometimes bowing and crossing themselves before the table, a strong statement of worship and prayer that it is Christ who covers their hearts and in whom they stand before God. One of the strongest “visuals” is, however, the simple act of holding empty hands open to receive the bread. It is hard to imagine a more potent way of acknowledging the first beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God,” than empty hands receiving the Sacrament of eternal life in Jesus Christ.

It is true, we could come to the table week after week, holding out empty hands, filled with hearts of pride and self-justification. In other words, the physical act does not necessarily mean a spiritual thing. Physical actions can easily turn into meaningless ritual, a substitute for spiritual substance. On the other hand, this gesture can serve as an expression of authentic faith (“Yes, I am truly a pauper before the Lord, and my only hope is his grace and mercy in Christ”) and as a reminder / teacher of true faith. Empty hands can teach cold hearts spiritual reality, if we let them.

In our fear of substituting substance for show, evangelical Christians have often ignored the power of our bodies. Kneeling, lying prostrate on the floor, or standing with hands uplifted in prayer can all be physical expressions of true postures of prayer – humility, brokenness and receptivity. Raising our hands in worship can be flamboyant, self-promotional and insensitive, or it can be the overflow of a heart of true praise and love for God. When God tells us through St. Paul, “I urge you, therefore brethren, to present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to the Lord, which is your reasonable service of worship,” he meant it. Give God your body! It is hard to take our souls and

bodies into two different places. If our bodies are joined with a prostitute (1 Corinthians 6:15-20), we are joined with the prostitute. If our bodies are drunk with wine, we are filled with a substitute source of joy & peace besides the Holy Spirit, and that is a spiritual problem (Ephesians 5:18). If our bodies express humble receptivity, there's a good chance we can be humble and receptive to the sustaining life of Christ we are receiving by faith.

What a delight to have the opportunity given to us to join body, soul and spirit in faith and worship, but it is up to us to bring our hearts to the table. May our hands teach our hearts and our hearts direct our hands.

Finishing Well

The end of weekly worship services at Church of the Redeemer features an ancient component of liturgy, the benediction. "Benediction" is an anglicized form of the Latin word for "blessing." A benediction is a declaration of God's blessing conferred on a person or group by a designated human speaker.

The heritage of benedictions is rooted in Jewish liturgy. It follows then that our earliest examples of benedictions from Scripture are from the earliest pages of the Bible. Noah blessed his sons (Genesis 9:26-27) and Melchizedek blessed Abram (Genesis 14:19-20).

Though benedictions are not limited to times of formal or corporate worship, they are clearly associated with them. In the Old Testament, formal benedictions were pronounced by the Aaronic priests. Numbers 6:24-26 embodies one of the most familiar of all benedictions:

The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make his face to shine upon you
And be gracious to you;
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you
And give you peace.

In the New Testament, they were pronounced in the epistles by the apostles, which were written to be read during the gatherings for worship. For example, St. Paul ends his letter to the Thessalonians with, "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it." (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

The important thing to keep in mind is that someone is used to speak and declare a blessing that has its origins in the heart of God. It is as if God cannot keep it to himself. His desire to bless and encourage his people bubbles forth and flows out through the priest or pastor over the people he calls his own.

If you notice, the language of benedictions focuses the action on God and his initiative, on what God is doing for us and in us, not on our abilities or efforts. Benedictions often declare deep spiritual realities that you or I understand only darkly. Blessings? Peace? Sanctification? We may know roughly what these things mean but we can't begin to make these things happen to us, or to anyone else. No, the verbs in the weekly benediction are what God is about in our lives. He is the one who blesses and keeps us. He sanctifies. He gives peace.

When the rector (pastor) pronounces the benediction, he is not bestowing a blessing that originates with him. The words he speaks are not his words. The actions are not his actions. Rather, as a spiritual leader of Church of the Redeemer Anglican Church, he is the human agent God has appointed to pronounce HIS blessing on us.

It is a powerful way to end our service. We've worshipped God through song and speech. We've listened and responded to his word. We've interceded for ourselves and the world in the Prayers of the People. We've confessed our sins and received the mysterious presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In the benediction, God responds to us by blessing us. We should therefore receive this blessing as if it has come directly from the lips of God himself.

Just as blessings can be received, they can be rejected or ignored. Let us be a people that hunger for the blessing of God.

After the benediction we sing one more song of praise to the Lord to conclude our service.

Just before we exit, we respond once more as a community in the Dismissal. This is typically a chance for us to commit ourselves to an active going-out and being the people of God. Sunday morning is a brief period in our weekly lives. We spend a great deal of time and energy working and performing ordinary and important tasks between Sundays. The last part of the service (receiving God's blessing and the Dismissal) reminds us that God is with us in every aspect of our lives – not just on Sunday morning. God will work his blessing out in our daily lives as we commit to live our daily lives authentically loving and serving him.

Liturgy, and the path it lays out for our worship is an important legacy we've inherited from our forbearers in the faith. It connects us with our past and prepares us for our future as the family of God in his kingdom. It shapes our faith and our experience of God: "lex orandi, lex credenda est" – the way you pray determines what you believe. It creates a path for personal and corporate worship and leads to doxology -- praise. But more than any of these things, liturgy is a servant that enables us to worship God in robust and deep ways.

Pastor Dan or any of our leaders are more than willing to meet with you to discuss any of these aspects of our worship more deeply or answer any questions you may have.

It is wonderful to share with you the beauty, wonder, mystery, and joy of the loving Father, grace-filled Son, and comforting Holy Spirit!