

GRACE VANCOUVER CHURCH



## **Why and How do we do liturgy at Grace Vancouver Church?**

### **Why do we come to worship?**

There are two reasons one might come to worship on a Sunday morning. The first is to be there for God, the other is to be there for man. One is appropriate, the other is not.

If we come there for man (that is, ourselves), then questions like, "Am I enjoying this?" "Do I like the preacher?" "Is there good fellowship?" and "Am I having a spiritual experience?" become the centre of our worship. We set the benchmark for a 'good service' according to the level of our individual sense of gratification. This is, in essence, consumerism. If this church is not giving me what I want, or if I am not getting the spiritual charge I expect each Sunday, then I should start looking around for a place that will give me what I feel I want at this moment.

The Apostle Paul rebuked the Corinthian church for putting their own selfish desires before God's glory, thereby demonstrating that they were coming together for man centred reasons. They were interested in coming to worship and the Lord's Supper primarily because they wanted to have a good time. The celebration that was supposed to drive them to a desire to come before a holy God was replaced with their own sense of need and desire for immediate gratification (1 Corinthians 11:17-34). Instead, Paul says that the reason for their gathering is to "show forth the Lord's death" (v 26).

However, if we come to a service for the purpose of worshipping God, then our entire attitude changes. The point of worship is not ourselves, but God. We come to worship him through Jesus Christ and his work on our behalf. Through Christ's death on the cross, the veil is torn, the people of God are welcomed to approach God the Father through the leading of the Holy Spirit with awe and in celebration. Worship literally means that "God is worthy of our praise". God is the centre of our attention, and our sense of joy in a worship service comes from the very fact that we are praising Him, however imperfectly. In light of this, we want our worship to not only come from our hearts, but we want to worship God in a way that the Holy Spirit has led the church to do both in the past and in the present. In this way, the visible and the invisible church have a connection. What we do together on Sunday mornings is a part of something much, much bigger than our immediate time and circumstances. What we do together today is a part of the ongoing practice and of the work of the Holy Spirit guiding His people in worship throughout the entirety of the Old and New Testaments, through two thousand years of church history, and most importantly, in eternity where our worship is only a reflection of the throne room of God where angels and saints praise the Father and the Lamb who was slain.

## Why do we worship liturgically?

Let me start with this story. There once was a guy who brought a beautiful ham home from the butcher to give to his wife. Every time he did this, she would take the ham and cut it into a square, the same size, before boiling it. He was always beside himself. "Why do you take such a beautiful ham and ruin it by cutting it into a square?" She said, "because this is how my Mama used to do it. The square shape makes it more succulent and juicy." He wasn't so sure about this, so he went to his mother-in-law "Why do you cut your ham into a square before you boil it?" Well, she said, it makes it so much better, so much more tasty, to do it this way." He then went to the grandmother and asked her "why does your daughter and granddaughter mutilate a beautiful ham by cutting it into a square?" She said, "I don't know why they do it, but when I was young, I had this little pot and had to cut the ham to fit into it...."

A lot of people feel that all tradition is like this, that we do what we do because it has simply been handed down to us and we unthinkingly continue the practice. But, we don't do liturgy simply because it is tradition and for tradition's sake.

Let me say this plainly, we all, every denomination and every individual church, worships liturgically. The word liturgy comes from a composite of two Greek words, (*leitourgia*) a word meaning originally a public duty, a service to the state undertaken by a citizen. Its elements are *leitōs* meaning *public*, and *ergo*, meaning *to do*. So, it was "the work of the people".

In the Septuagint it is used for the public service of the temple (e.g., Exodus 38:27). Going forward, it comes to have a religious sense as the function of the priests and the ritual service of the temple (e.g., Joel 1:9). In the New Testament this religious meaning is carried over. In Luke 1:23, Zachariah goes home when "the days of his *liturgy*" are over. In Hebrews 8:6, the high priest of the New Law "has obtained a better *liturgy*", that is a better kind of public religious service than that of the Temple.

So in Christian use liturgy meant the public official service of the Church that corresponded to the official service of the Temple in the Old Law. It has become the work of the people of God of offering themselves through their praise and their worship to Him through the perfect offering of Jesus Christ on the cross. This specifically includes the whole complex of official services, all the rites, ceremonies, prayers, and sacraments of the Church, (as opposed to private devotions). It also means that the minister and the people are worshipping together. The minister is not 'entertaining us' or sitting in an exalted position in the place of Christ, but is leading the worship of God's people of which he is a part.

Because the early church replicated much of the liturgy of the Synagogues, adding fuller meaning to traditional forms of worship, appropriate prayers reflecting the work of Christ, and other rites that embodied the church's central mission of proclaiming Christ and the New Covenant, there are obvious overlaps you will find in any Christian tradition, whether it be Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, or Protestant.

The question for us is, "how do we, within our own tradition (that is, Presbyterian), express our liturgical worship in a way that embraces not only the historical past but our current culture and present place in history?"

In answer to this, there are several insights that are helpful in understanding where we intersect between these two places of past and present, as well as what the apparent trends are in a post-modern world's interaction with faith:

1. The post modern era is much like the pre-modern era. We are closer to the ancient world than we often realize.
2. Love, community and historical forms of worship are the embodied apologetic that speaks to this generation.
3. Ancient, liturgical elements give a rootless people a sense of history.
4. Ancient, liturgical elements help the worship experience to embody the meta-narrative that people have lost. So, in worship, the veil grows thin and the people taste, see and feel the age to come.
5. Mystery, word and sacrament, and liturgy blend well with joyful and enthusiastic expressions of worship.
6. Church planting is now the way to reach new people with the gospel. By inviting the world into the fullness, joy and service of the church, we go beyond evangelizing people simply so they might have a 'salvation experience' in a privatized and individualistic fashion.

### **What is the liturgy of Grace Vancouver Church and how does it fit together?**

Below is the flow of worship with accompanying reasons and explanations as to why we worship as we do.

#### **Prelude**

Prelude should be music, signaling that folks should begin taking their seats and begin focusing on worship. Again, the point of worship is not fellowship in itself, but giving our focus and attention to God together, as a body. The opening words from the minister should be as follows, with a general and conversational welcome to visitors.

Minister: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

#### **Call to Worship**

The text provided by a preacher or in consult with the worship leader. The preacher or person leading the liturgy should read.

#### **Prayer of Adoration**

Prayer focused on the adoration of God. The prayer is typically Trinitarian in focus and may be based on the text from the Call to Worship.

### **Songs of Praise**

We are called to worship God with songs, hymns and spiritual songs. (Ephesians 5:19-20, Colossians 3:16). Music and singing to the Lord is practiced in both the Old and New Testaments as a central and binding act of worship. It was practiced communally by the Temple Priests and by the people who went up to Jerusalem to worship and offer sacrifices to God. Worship, for the church, is a sacrifice of praise, culminating with the Lord's Supper.

### **Prayer for the Children / (Children's Lesson on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Month)**

We are a covenant community, who through baptism and fellowship recognize that our children are indeed a part of God's church. As such, we pray for them as they go to learn the Word in a way that is appropriate and engaging for their age. The children who participate in the Lord's Supper may return to do so before the end of the service.

On the second Sunday of the Month, the Children's Ed or Spiritual Direction leader invites the children up for a short lesson.

### **Community Updates**

Necessary reminders and updates on what the community is doing for the Kingdom. This is also a good time to have farewells and prayer for those who are moving away, for Membership, or even Baptisms.

### **\*Mission Spotlights or Baptisms**

Typically, we have had our announcements from those doing missions during this time, usually once a month. Baptisms can also fall into this slot.

### **Prayer for the World, the Church and the City**

Essentially, these are intercessory prayers offered up by members of the congregation, on behalf of the world, God's church and our city. They may be extemporaneous or written prayers with response.

### **Confession**

We confess our sins together in this fashion as is the tradition of the Reformation churches. As we do not practice confession and absolution before a priest, in Roman Catholic fashion, we do as a congregation of priests confessing our sins together. We confess our sins to the one and only mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, our high priest. We recognize that our personal sins are not only our own, individual burden, but the burden of the body of Christ. There are corporate sins that we should confess together.

### **Private Confession**

Private confession is a time to go before Christ, our mediator, with the particular sins of our own hearts. It is a time not to beat ourselves up, or work ourselves into a swirling ball of guilt, or to attempt to dredge up the appropriate emotions in an act of self-contrition. It is a time to bring our sins before God, admit our guilt, and ask for pardon. We have our time of confession before the sermon so that we might have a clean heart and a clear conscience in order to rightly receive the word of God. In some traditions, confession comes after the Sermon as a response to the sermon. Either way is perfectly acceptable.

### **Assurance of Pardon**

This is typically done by the minister or an elder in the church. Here, the minister assures the penitent that God is faithful and just to forgive our sins. It is not the absolution of a priest to the laity, but of the minister offering us comfortable words that Christ does indeed forgive our sins. This is important, because it declares the promises of God overtly to the people, reminding them of their freedom through the gospel.

### **Song of Assurance**

The song of assurance is a wonderful tradition at GVC. It is a song of praise, further illuminating the proclamation given at the Assurance of Pardon. It invites the entire congregation to proclaim to one another the promises of the gospel.

### **Tithes and Offerings**

It is the offering of tithes and gifts toward the building up of God's Kingdom. This was a normative part of Jewish worship, both in the Temple and the Synagogue. In the early church, only baptized believers were expected to give (we occasionally announce that 'visitors' are our guests and that we would rather pray for them and get to know them than take their money). We recognize, at the offertory, that all we have belongs to God, and that the portion of our wealth that we give to His church is for the needs of the church and the needs of the poor. There are plans to have a separate offertory for the poor, a 'deacons' offering, at some time in the future. A prayer is traditionally given consecrating the gifts to holy use by the church.

### **Doxology**

The Doxology (lit. "Glory-saying") is a song sung at the end of a section of the service, and in the case of this liturgy, it provides a break between the service of Song and Prayer and the service of Word and Sacrament which follows.

## God's Word Today (Sermon)

Sermon comes from the Latin word meaning "speech". It is fair to say that the sermon is the servant to the Scripture, meaning that it is an explanation and application of the Word of God. It is again a part of Jewish tradition that a young man would read the Scriptures and then comment on it in the Synagogue. It's centrality and necessary connection to the Lord's Supper in the service was lost during the medieval period, only to be regained with the Reformation. It is the central form of teaching in the church, usually by the Elders or the minister, and seeks to illuminate and apply the Word of God to the life of the preacher and the congregation. It must include, and is given for the purpose of, proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

## the Lord's Supper | congregation stands

Fencing the Table: it is at this point that the minister fences the table and explains how the elements are distributed to the congregation. Fencing the table is important in that we want to remind those who do not believe that this is a family meal for Christians. Paul mentions that there were those who partook of the Supper in an unworthy manner (1 Corinthians 11:27-32) and that they were actually getting sick and even dying. Whatever was happening there, it has been the general practice of the church that only Christians partake of the Supper because only a Christian can discern their heart to determine if they are right with God and with their neighbour. The minister's job is to protect the sanctity of the service itself but also to protect the non-believer from themselves! There are prayers in the bulletin offered for the non-believer to partake in. Also, we can notice that we do not partake of the Supper until after the Confession of Sin. This is to avoid our partaking of the Supper in an unworthy manner through our own negligence of reflecting on our sin against God and our neighbour.

Sursum Corda –“Lift up your hearts!": The Lord's Supper then begins with the *Sursum Corda*. This formula was a part of the very first Eucharistic Liturgy found in the "Apostolic Traditions" of the third century and was used throughout the ancient church. In the Reformation, Calvin was particularly fond of this section of the Supper, as his view of what happens at the Supper (that we are spiritually lifted to Christ and united with Him by faith through the Holy Spirit) is encapsulated so well in these words. They are saying that our hearts are being lifted up to Christ as an offering to him, giving thanks for what we are about to receive through His body and blood.

*Sanctus*: From the Latin word "holy", the Sanctus is taken from Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8 and was a part of the ancient church's worship. It is reminding us that we are preparing to approach the Table, which is part and parcel of the ultimate feast of the marriage supper of the Lamb, which takes place in heaven in the presence of Christ. Again, what we experience in Sunday worship is meant to reflect

worship that is happening and will eternally continue in heaven. We worship God not alone, but with all the angels and the Saints from past, present and future.

### **The Great Thanksgiving**

Minister: The Lord be with you.

**People: And also with you.**

Minister: Lift up your hearts!

**People: We lift them up to the Lord!**

Minister: Let us give thanks unto our Lord God.

**People: It is right to give Him thanks and praise.**

Minister: It is right, and good, and a joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks unto you, O Lord, our Father Almighty, everlasting God. Therefore, with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify Your holy name; evermore praising You and singing:

### **Holy Lord**

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, Heaven and earth of Your glory are full. Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest!

### **Words of Institution and Declaration of Faith**

Minister: Therefore, we proclaim the mystery of our faith:

**People: Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again.**

*Anamnesis*: Latin meaning "to remember". This section of the Lord's Supper contains the Eucharistic Prayer (remembering the gospel) and the Words of Institution ("do this in remembrance of me").

- Eucharistic Prayer: Praise of God for His redemptive acts. This is an opportunity for the sermon topic to tie word and sacrament together, or there are ancient prayers which may be read. This is the place for a clear presentation of the gospel through thanksgiving.
- Words of Institution: These are the words of Jesus. As much as possible, stay with the gospel texts, Paul's summation in 1 Corinthians 11, or preferably to the ancient liturgical form.
- Declaration of Faith: Said by the minister and the congregation at the conclusion of the words of Institution. This is simply a proclamation of what we believe concerning Christ, that his death was the atoning sacrifice for our sins, that the resurrection is the promise that that sacrifice was complete, and that his return will bring us face to face with him and to His heavenly table.

## **Prayer of Thanksgiving and Blessing**

The minister continues with a Prayer of Thanksgiving and the Epiclesis, or the calling of the Holy Spirit, to sanctify the elements. It is at this point that the bread and wine are consecrated. Here, the minister prays that the elements would truly be the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and be set aside for that purpose. This is a recognition that Christ 'once and for all' sacrifice is being truly represented through the sign and seal of the Sacrament.

The minister lifts up the bread and the cup, following the Lord's Prayer, and proclaims: "Brothers and sisters, the gifts of God for the People of God, take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving."

## **Distribution of the Bread and the Cup**

### **Song of Thanksgiving (Concluding Song)**

There is often a prayer of thanksgiving after the Lord's Supper, we sing ours. We sing a thanksgiving to God because of all Christ has done for us. This is in preparation for being sent out into the world to continue our song of thanksgiving and proclamation of the gospel.

### **Benediction**

Meaning "good word", and is a blessing proclaimed by the minister to the congregation. The congregation is now sent into the world.

### **Peace**

Minister: The peace of the Lord be with you all

#### **People: And also with you**

Minister: Greet one another with a sign of God's peace

As our final act of worship, the peace is offered to one another. Because we have confessed our sins to God and to one another, we can greet one another with the Shalom of God, declaring that the work of the Holy Spirit is among us and that the Kingdom of God is at hand. This is a practice that dates back to the second century.