

Our Way of Worship Governs Our Believing

J.j. St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 57th & Broadway, Sacramento, CA
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Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, in truth and love. Amen.

The mood of the church on this Sunday after the Ascension of our Lord is somewhat lonesome as we see the departure of Jesus & His disciples waiting for the Holy Spirit. I've been thinking about Prof. George Hoyer lately; I guess because he died a few weeks ago in his 93rd year.

He was a seminary professor at Concordia, St. Louis quite a few years after I graduated, but Ruth & I got to know him when he stayed in our parsonage once back in Kansas. He taught homiletics -- the art of preaching -- and also courses on worship.

To honor his memory, today I'm using his formula for a sermon.

His sermon outline is simple: POINT-PROBLEM-POWER; three P's, easy to remember.

So I looked at all four of today's Scriptures and asked three questions:

- **What's the point?**
- **What's the problem?**
- **What's the Power to overcome the problem and get to the point?** So

Part I -- What's the Point?

What's the point of our scriptures this Sunday?

One suggestion is to pray this prayer of Jesus which He offered up to His Father: "Protect them in your name."

OK. Good prayer. It is found in today's gospel reading.

Another suggestion is that the point is unity in the church based also on the gospel.

But I have titled this sermon, "**Our Way of Worship Governs Our Believing**", and I am offering that as **the point of today's scriptures.**

Here's why -- four examples.

In Acts 1, our first lesson describes how surprised the eleven were at the Ascension of our Lord -- Jesus just lifting up! So they just stood there looking up!

But then, thanks to the prodding of an angel, they went back into Jerusalem, probably to that famous upper room, and we read, v.14, **They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.**

Note: They didn't just disband when Jesus was gone. They didn't just go fishing like they did after the resurrection. They believed a promise & were constantly in prayer. The point is that they worshipped as they awaited the promised Holy Spirit.

Second example. Psalm 68 begins worshipfully in prayer: **v. 1 Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered; 3 But let the righteous be glad and rejoice before God;**

Next it recites what God has done for his people: He is, **v. 5, father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, ...from [His] bounty, God, [He] provided for the poor.**

Then it urges us: **4 Sing to God, sing in praise of his name, 32b sing praise to the Lord...in [His] sanctuary.**

King David, who wrote this song, may have written 72 of the 150 psalms, maybe more.

The point? His psalm encourages us to pray and praise -- that is, to worship our God!

Then I see that our Second Lesson from First Peter ends with a doxology, did you notice? **11 To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.** A doxology! A "word of praise" Perhaps a phrase from an early Christian Liturgy? A doxology to God the Father!

And lastly the Gospel reading brings us a beautiful example of our Lord's prayer life in His "High-priestly prayer."

So what's the point in these texts? **Our Way of Worship Governs Our Believing**, and so God's people take time to worship Almighty God.

Part II -- What's the Problem?

How do our readings today diagnose us? What keeps us from getting the point?

Back to our first lesson -- this comes under the heading of stupid questions -- Acts 1:6

"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

The Disciples had the hardest time getting the message of why Jesus came to earth.

And so do we.

Our Way of Worship Governs Our Believing, but one big trouble is that we worship before a number of different altars. For example:

One of my seminary classmates, a systematics theology prof. for many years, wrote:

"A few weeks ago we were out of town for the confirmation ceremony of 24 eighth-graders.... Each confirmand offers a personal confession of faith to the assembly in a Friday evening service before Confirmation Sunday.... The personal confessions had been prepared in advance, were then printed in the Friday service folder (2 pages each) and then publicly confessed one by one from the lectern. **In nine of the 24 confessions the word Jesus or Christ does not appear at all.** God is confessed, but there is no Christ.... In seven of them the word Jesus or Christ (or both) occur, but with no reference to his work of salvation.... In [only] eight of them the name of Jesus occurs with explicit reference to his saving work."

At what altars do our young people worship? Where do they get their notions of God?

For that matter, what tempting altars has our culture placed before all of us in the entertainment media? in the business world; in the new "social media," etc.

Could all of us here today sit down and write a two page summary of our faith?

And I haven't even mentioned the various addictions to substances and behaviors that multiply in a rich and affluent society such as ours.

But I should hasten to add, or Pastor T. may remind me later, that many of these things that are problems to us may be used in moderation without sin.

It is the **abuse** of a thing, not its proper **use**, that leads us into "misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice," as Luther wrote in his explanation of the Sixth Petition.

Other problems are seen by King David: in Ps. 68 God has "**enemies**;" there are "**the fatherless**"; "**the lonely**"; "**the rebels**", and all of them once part of God's people.

Then St. Peter advises us that we should: **"...not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you."**

He points out that **"Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."** Terrible picture -- realistic picture! Evil does exist in our world.

And our Lord Jesus, praying for His Disciples, knowing that He is about to leave them, utters these chilling words to His Heavenly Father: **"...but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name..."**

We, my friends at St. Paul's, **"are still in the world,"** and that's a problem.

The world, Luther reminds us, is a part of that evil trinity, the Devil, the world, and our flesh, and all three are problems to us when it comes to offering our Creator, our Redeemer, and our Sanctifier the worship and reverence that is due His name.

Therefore, Part III, What is the Power that overcomes our problems?

Remember the point? **Our Way of Worship Governs Our Believing**, and so God's people take time to worship Almighty God.

Well and good. But the power to worship Almighty God is found only in the good news that God has given us in the gospel message.

That's how **Our Way of Worship Governs Our Believing.**

The ancients had a saying: **"Lex orandi, lex credendi."** [Bretzke, Consecrated Phrases, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 1998, p. 65.]

This axiom goes back to the 5th C., A.D., to Prosper of Aquitaine, and it means that how the church prays, witnesses to what the church believes.

Not only 'witnesses', but in real ways our Liturgy shapes our faith and our witness.

So our Bible readings today, along with hymns & creed & sacrament, mold us, shape us.

Look! Acts 1 has a gospel promise: **"...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you;"**

And a prediction, that we will just naturally, **"... be [His] witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."**

We witness to our faith in our worship life here in this place, but we also witness by our daily lives -- "our life-as-worship" -- is the phrase coined by Prof. Hoyer.

By "life-as-worship" he meant that our whole life becomes an offering of worship to God. And so, Prof. Hoyer also taught that "our life-as-worship grows by way of our worship life."

Here he meant that when we are regularly at worship, our lives out in the world will be an offering of worship to Almighty God. We need the power of the good news.

Ps. 68 has good news: It reads that God gives the lonely a home; He sets prisoners free; He makes provision for the poor; and David ends his psalm: **"...the God of Israel gives power and strength to his people. Praise be to God!"** Yes, we trust His power.

Or listen to St. Peter: **4:13b ...you participate in the sufferings of Christ.... 5:7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. ...10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ,... will ... make you strong, firm and steadfast."**

By His grace, God called us!

But now, our Lord Jesus lets us listen in on His High Priestly prayer as He speaks confidently to His Father: **v.4, "I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do."**

There's the final message of power -- Jesus, the Christ, finished "the work"!

His last words on the cross were, "It is finished."

All that was promised to God's people down through the ages was completed!

Here in His High Priestly prayer, prayed on the very night in which He was betrayed, He already knew that He would finish what the Father had given Him to do.

And what was that? He would pay the price of our salvation with His last ounce of blood.

That is how He brought glory to His Father on earth, namely, **"...by finishing the work [He] gave me to do."**

He did this for you and for me.

What more is there to say? Such good news "demands," in the words of the 18th century hymn by Isaac Watts, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*, "demands my soul, my life, my all!"

And so we worship, not moved by our own power, but by the power of the One who loved us and gave Himself into death for us, Christ Jesus our Savior.

That's the point -- **Our Way of Worship Governs Our Believing**, and so God's people take time to worship Almighty God.

Our problem lies in the weakness of our flesh plus the temptations of the devil and the world out there.

But the power of God moves us to come together, to lift up our voices here in this place, and here He empowers us to make our voices heard out in the world.

That is our duty. Luther wrote: "For all this it is my duty to thank and to praise, to serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true."

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

S.D.g. -- The Rev. Dr. Donald Schedler, Ph.D., Chaplain, Snowline Hospice, Diamond Springs, CA.