

# The Whys of Worship: What Christians do on Sundays and why we do it.

Class #2: January 14, 2018:

What do you expect? Sorting out assumptions and expectations of worship.

People come to church with a variety of expectations and assumptions. Different denominational backgrounds, different experiences within the same denomination (or no church experience of any kind) means that people assess and understand worship differently. Should church be quiet or boisterous, casual or fancy, complicated or simple? A few categories can help us understand why we sometimes get confused about the “right way” to do worship.

|  |                                |
|--|--------------------------------|
| <u>Small</u>                                     | <u>Large</u>                   |
| personal connections <i>and</i> personal demands | Safe to be vulnerable with God |
| -----community dynamics of size-----             |                                |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <u>Informal</u>                         | <u>Formal</u>   |
| Works for small groups                  | Helpful for large groups  |
| Highly adaptive<br>(can be interactive) | Adapts if you plan for it<br>(there’s a liturgy for everything) |
| Easy to make familiar to outsiders      | Provides predictability—like rules in sports                    |
| Often very personal, (in small groups)  | Helps each person know his or her role                          |

|                             |                                    |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <u>Immanence</u>            | <u>Transcendence</u>               |
| God is close to us—intimacy | God is different from us—reverence |
| God is our friend           | God is our king                    |
| Familiarity                 | Mystery, Majesty & Awe             |
| Jesus’ humanity             | Jesus’ divinity                    |
| Personal                    | Limitless                          |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <u>“Monastic” approach to worship</u>                                | <u>“Cathedral” approach to worship</u>                         |
| Learning   | Proclamation   |
| Growth   | Celebration  |
| Works for individuals  | Works for communities  |
| Contemplative  | Expressive   |
| Interior   | Exterior & the world   |
| Part of a regular rhythm of life<br>(set cycle of prayer & readings) | Marks the occasion<br>(special festivals, or special services) |
| Weekly Lectionary (calendar of readings)                             | Calendar is interrupted for Lent and Easter                    |
| The “Daily Office”   | Burial, Marriage, Confirmation                                 |
| “Expository” sermons:<br>verse by verse explanation                  | “Proclamatory” sermons: a fresh look at the<br>Good News       |
| Congregational singing & informal leadership                         | Professional choirs & trained leaders                          |
| Often (but not always) informal, immanence                           | Often (not always) formal, transcendence                       |
| Committed, regular communities                                       | More transient communities; visitors                           |

One person might pay no attention to communion or the hymns, and focus solely on what content was taught in the sermon. Another person might focus less on learning, and more on the opportunity to praise God in song or celebrate the sacraments with other people. Though the first person is more likely to be a Presbyterian than a monk, this describes a tension between “monastic” and “cathedral” expectations of worship.

What do you expect from worship? What makes you say “I really feel like I went to church today!”

What should be the focus in any style? God!

Both proclamation and learning, personal growth and community celebration can have God at the center.

Where are the risks in any style? How can any style get off track?

Learning can lose its grounding in God, or its connection to our life experience

The occasion can be about us rather than God

The form (including informal) can stifle the function

One style can push out the other style, leaving an imbalance

### **That’s Why: High & Low**

An old difference, especially among Anglicans, is “High” and “Low.” Historically, “High” church tended toward retaining the sacramental traditions and clergy authority we inherited from Roman Catholics. “Low” church tended to more simplicity and emphasis on the Bible and a personal confession of faith. In the 1800s, High and Low were associated with “Anglo-catholic” and “Evangelical.” This related to style as well: “High” looked more catholic (fancy vestments, Eucharist every Sunday, clergy called “Father,” more emphasis on the sacraments), and “Low” looked more protestant (simpler worship style & architecture, communion once a month, more emphasis on preaching). In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, these divisions began to moderate and blend. History still influences parishes, but the labels are less stark as parishes often blend elements of each.

### **That’s Why:**

**A Lectionary** is a prescribed list of readings to use in worship according to a calendar schedule. We use these lectionaries so that worshipers are exposed to a broad sample of the Bible. There is a three year lectionary for Sundays, and a two year daily lectionary. Though these lectionaries don’t capture all of the Bible, they do a representative job. One disadvantage is that the scripture may not fit the situation (this is a “cathedral” vs. “monastic” question), but the preacher may bring up another text in the sermon to adjust. Some unique occasions have their own readings assigned. The lectionary we use (the “Revised Common Lectionary”) is used by many Protestant denominations (and is very similar to the Roman Catholic lectionary). Thus many churches are hearing the same readings on Sundays.

**Choirs** are there to lead the community in worship of God, rather than entertain. Sometimes, choirs sing while people listen, and this can be a ministry that draws our hearts and minds to God. But an essential role of any choir is to support the singing of the whole community. It is easier for one person to sing with confidence if there are others confidently singing too!

*Think of other worship styles:*

Mega Churches (like a rock concert for evangelism objectives; but emphasizing small groups)

Small groups (interpersonal and adaptive)

Taize (meditative, but shared)

Reformed (e.g. Baptist, Presbyterian, Congregational: focused on the sermon, often a *teaching* sermon)

Orthodox (Other-worldly—lifting the community up into heaven

(“lift up your hearts/we lift them to The Lord”)

Charismatic (with the gifts of the Spirit, including prophecy or speaking in tongues)

High & Low (see above)

**Liturgy:** (“work of the people”): the form and structure of worship.

**Next Week: Where did this come from? The Development of Liturgy**

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